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General Assembly

Sixty-first session

Official Records

11th plenary meeting
Tuesday, 19 September 2006, 3 p.m.
New York

President: Ms. Al-Khalifa ..... (Bahrain)

The meeting was called to order at 3.15 p.m.

Address by Mr. Denis Sassou Nguesso, President of the Republic of the Congo

The President: The Assembly will now hear an address by the President of the Republic of the Congo.

Mr. Denis Sassou Nguesso, President of the Republic of the Congo, was escorted into the General Assembly Hall.

The President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations His Excellency Mr. Denis Sassou Nguesso, President of the Republic of the Congo, and to invite him to address the Assembly.

President Nguesso (*spoke in French*): Madam, your election to the presidency of the General Assembly at its sixty-first session is the sign of a favourable turn of events in the world. I congratulate you and I welcome you not only as an experienced diplomat, with established skills and qualifications, but also as a great advocate of human rights. I wish also to commend, through you, your country, the State of Bahrain, for its tremendous contribution to the promotion of the values of peace, freedom and equality.

I should like also to express our deepest gratitude to Mr. Jan Eliasson for the wisdom and competence with which he guided the previous session. He deserves plaudits for having led to a successful outcome the difficult negotiations on the establishment of the Human Rights Council and of the Peacebuilding Commission. I would also like to congratulate a great son of Africa, a friend and brother, Mr. Kofi Annan, for his work as Secretary-General. His outstanding work was recognized at the seventh session of the Conference of the African Union held last July at Banjul and was given a moving and memorable tribute that I would like to reiterate here. Mr. Secretary-General, the world is grateful to you; Africa is proud of you. Furthermore, I would like to welcome Montenegro as a Member State, whose admission reinforces the universal character of our Organization. We wish that country a warm welcome.

This session opens at a time when the overall situation in the world is becoming more and more complex with reasons for concern and reasons for hope. It is our responsibility to ensure through multilateralism that hope overcomes fear and that the world becomes safer for future generations. We must reaffirm our faith in multilateralism, because the many challenges of our time must be confronted collectively; no State can deal with them alone. The same is true for the environment, terrorism, drug trafficking etc. Since its creation, the United Nations has never slackened in the search for ways and means to assume its responsibilities.

But today more than ever, it is necessary to encourage the search for collective solutions for the many sorts of phenomena that weaken global peace. Today more than ever, we must join our energies to build a world in which human beings can live where

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they wish in dignity, safe from need and fear. That is the purpose of our joint activities.

In order to eradicate armed violence, we must work for peace through the prevention and settlement of conflicts. The situation in the Middle East continues to be a serious threat to international peace and security. It is urgent that a just, lasting and comprehensive solution be found to this conflict that is ravaging this region. We need a solution based on the agreed proposals, such as the Road Map and the relevant resolutions of our Organization. The role of the Quartet in this respect is crucial. The cessation of hostilities, after one month of pointless violence in Lebanon, must be consolidated in order to achieve a lasting ceasefire.

As for Africa, positive advances have been made in the Democratic Republic of the Congo with the holding of general elections. Every effort must be made to ensure the successful conclusion of the electoral process, namely the second round of the presidential elections. The fact that we are now speaking of peacebuilding in Burundi, Liberia and Sierra Leone is not only a reason for satisfaction but also a reason for hope for other countries still in a state of conflict. At the same time, in many other situations, such as those in Côte d'Ivoire, the Sudan or in Somalia, the search for the way to solve those conflicts is still on the agenda. We wish to develop a natural partnership between our regional organization, the African Union, and the United Nations in managing these crises in accordance with the provisions of Chapter VII of the Charter. This is the case in Côte d'Ivoire with the creation of an international working group.

By deciding to hold the meeting of its Peace and Security Council on Darfur here in New York City, the African Union has reiterated its willingness to consider all constructive proposals regarding this conflict. The African Union's unflagging efforts to ensure peace in Darfur has never been in question. The seriousness of the situation in this region of the Sudan calls for more energetic and more effective action. We solemnly call on the Government of the Sudan to make a full assessment of the tragedy that is taking place before our eyes.

In the case of Somalia, we appeal to the international community to provide its support to efforts to re-establish peace and reconciliation in Somalia. The international community must not lose patience faced with the meagre results in the search for peace in several of the African conflicts. The international community must provide strong support for the efforts undertaken at many levels with, of course, the agreement of the countries concerned. As the current chair of the African Union, we promise to work fully to promote peace and security on the continent.

I do not wish to end my statement on this subject without recognizing the courage of peacekeepers throughout the world, especially in Africa. Our gratitude also goes out to the civil society and humanitarian organizations that work courageously and with dedication to relieve the suffering of people.

One of the major challenges that I mentioned earlier is that of development. The international community dealt especially with this question during the Millennium Summit by establishing the Millennium Development Goals to be achieved before 2015. The assessment that we conducted last year revealed serious weaknesses. It was clearly apparent that resources were lacking and that it was essential to look for new sources of financing.

Also, we must give due credit to the initial responses to the appeal launched here a few months ago during the High-Level meeting held on eradicating HIV/AIDS, within the framework of our commitment to achieve universal access to HIV/AIDS prevention, treatment and care by 2010.

We welcome the International Drug Purchase Facility (UNITAID) initiative launched by the French Government to mobilize resources derived from the taxation of airplane tickets. Congo, among other countries, has joined this initiative. This effort is in line with the Abuja Declaration and Framework for Action for the Fight Against HIV/AIDS, Tuberculosis and Other Related Infectious Diseases. It is also in line with the Brazzaville Commitment, which presents the common African position. The African Union summit also declared a state of emergency in Africa with regard to those diseases.

In discussing the issue of migration and development a few days ago in this Hall, the United Nations took a look at an area of involvement that has not been sufficiently studied, specifically that of individuals and other entities — business and

economic institutions — in bringing people together and sharing the common goods of our planet.

The African Union, meeting in Banjul, took this opportunity to declare a common position that emphasized the positive nature of the role that should be played by migration if it is correctly integrated into an approach to profitable development for the receiving countries, as it is for the countries of origin of the migrants.

Our Organization has launched a vast reform programme, of which some results are already tangible. A few moments ago, I talked about the establishment of the Human Rights Council, as well as the Peacebuilding Commission. Organizational reform seeks to adapt our Organization to changes that have occurred throughout the world over the past 60 years.

The African Union has made the reform of the Security Council and the reinvigoration of the General Assembly a major issue of concern. We must improve the representative nature of the Security Council, which is the true lynchpin of the entire institutional architecture of the United Nations.

The African proposal for an equitable enlargement of the membership of the Council constitutes a fundamental pursuit, which cannot be replaced by simple palliative measures. We also believe that the Security Council must improve its procedures and its working methods to lay the basis for consensual work. On subjects as serious as counter-terrorism or nuclear non-proliferation, seeking a consensus must continually be pursued through cooperation and dialogue. Between those who give priority to compliance with the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons and those who, rightly or wrongly, call for effective, concomitant disarmament and the recognition of a universal right of access to technologies in all areas, there is no doubt much to be discussed, but this must be done in good faith.

We must refrain from radicalizing our attitudes by turning the discussion into a conflict of values or civilizations, because, most often, the problem is really only due to a lack of dialogue and communication.

All these problems and challenges prove, if even there was a need to do so, the importance of the United Nations. The United Nations is necessary because it is the instrument of international relations; it is the enzyme that can give us global peace and security; it is, really, the conscience of mankind. The world would not be what it is, without the United Nations.

Still, our Organization has not succeeded, in spite of this confident affirmation of its role, in changing with times to fulfil the deepest aspirations of nations and peoples. We know that the United Nations can achieve that goal if the nations that created it, nations throughout the world, from the most powerful to the most humble, were to give to the United Nations, without hindrance or hypocrisy, the means that it needs to serve humanity.

Africa, I can assure you, is prepared to do its part in this highly anticipated debate.

The President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the President of the Republic of the Congo for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Denis Sassou Nguesso, President of the Republic of the Congo, was escorted from the General Assembly Hall.

Address by Mr. Vicente Fox, President of the United Mexican States

The President: The Assembly will now hear an address by the President of the United Mexican States.

Mr. Vicente Fox, President of the United Mexican States, was escorted into the General Assembly Hall.

The President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations His Excellency Mr. Vicente Fox, President of the United Mexican States, and to invite him to address the Assembly.

President Fox (*spoke in Spanish*): Twenty-one years ago, on a day like today, a terrible earthquake battered my country. We remember the victims, and we express our ongoing solidarity with their family members.

Madam President, on behalf of Mexico, let me congratulate you on your election to the presidency of the General Assembly at its sixty-first session. We wish you every success.

The Mexican people thank Mr. Jan Eliasson for his leadership during the Assembly's sixtieth session

and for his contribution to the United Nations reform process.

Mexico warmly welcomes the people of Montenegro to this Organization of free and juridically equal nations. We welcome all nations that today have joined the free and democratic nations, through genuine representation of their peoples, and are united in the struggle against terrorism and in favour of human rights.

A few days ago, we commemorated the fifth anniversary of a terrorist act that plunged many families of this and other countries into mourning. We offer our sympathy to those who have suffered the violence and cruelty of terrorism. Mexico strongly condemns that terrible evil, as it condemns all acts of aggression or violence. We repudiate any action that undermines peace or conflicts with the noble principles and purposes of our Organization.

Throughout the past six decades, the peoples of the United Nations have seen that the use of force does not solve problems; on the contrary, it often aggravates them. Peace and development are the fruit of mutual respect and the cooperation to which such respect gives rise.

The peoples of the United Nations are well aware that the deterioration of peace and security is the result of insufficient international dialogue and cooperation. We know, too, that many of the setbacks — such as those in the field of disarmament and those that take the form of aggression against other people or the environment — are caused by a lack of respect among nations.

These are very challenging times. Our peoples today face such situations as the persistence of long-standing international conflicts or the emergence of new tensions and threats to international peace. They also must tackle problems ranging from poverty, disease and illiteracy to inequality of opportunity and the urgent need for more inclusive dialogue aimed at increasing mutual understanding.

Humanity is desperately seeking respect, understanding, and cooperation among nations. There will be no peace without respect among nations, no development without cooperation among them.

These are challenging times, but also times of hope. I believe that hope and goodness alone can give us the necessary strength and drive to achieve our goals and fulfil our dreams.

This house, the foremost of the international forums established by mankind, is built upon the principles and values shared by all peoples, the product of their common essence. Here, we summon up what is best in us. Here, we show that what unites us is not force and animosity, but hope and solidarity. Here, we are united by our ideals and our will to preserve future generations from the scourge of war. Here, we work together to foster the dignity and worth of the human person, and, shoulder to shoulder, we promote the economic and social progress of all of our peoples. Here, we make firm commitments, such as the Millennium Development Goals, and we work enthusiastically in order to go forward and achieve those goals. This is no small task. There are many challenges, because the goals are ambitious. The magnitude of the challenges cannot and should not overshadow the scope of our common will.

Mexico's message is one of hope and of faith in what we are capable of achieving together. It is a message of confidence in the work done by our United Nations. This is the message of Mexico, whose people conquered democracy in 2000 and in so doing inspired hope for a new future of prosperity and justice.

Mexico is a country with well-established institutions which guide and lead our nation. It is currently experiencing unprecedented freedoms. My people live and work in peace, enjoy stability and have their eyes set on new horizons of well-being and justice.

The democratic Mexico is firmly committed to protecting human rights. We are very proud to be a founding member of the Human Rights Council and to occupy its first presidency. We will continue working with enthusiasm and determination in order to make the Council an organ that responds effectively to the challenges posed by human rights.

Mexico is a country that cherishes its roots and traditions and treasures its heritage as a land of many and diverse cultures. We prize the legacy of our indigenous peoples and are proud of our indigenous present. We are actively engaged in the recognition and promotion of the rights of indigenous peoples at the international level.

In May, a Rarámuri woman from the state of Chihuahua named Isabel said to me, "Mr. President, it is certainly true that all human beings are different from one another, that we see the world through different lenses and that we do not all share the same beliefs. Nevertheless, all human beings are equal in dignity and stature". She asked me to pass on that message. I promised her that I would do so, and today I am keeping my word by bringing Isabel's voice and those of our other indigenous sisters and brothers to this forum. Isabel's voice is the voice of all Mexican women and men who are fighting discrimination.

Thanks to the commitment of the members of the Human Rights Council, the General Assembly will have before it for consideration a draft United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. On behalf of the indigenous peoples of Mexico and of the rest of the world, I call upon each and every State Member of this Organization to adopt that draft Declaration and to endow it with the means necessary for it to promote respect for the rights of indigenous peoples.

Five years ago, in a spirit of great enthusiasm and in the quest for a more just and human-centred world for millions of people with disabilities, my country, Mexico, presented the General Assembly with a proposal for a draft United Nations convention on the protection and promotion of the rights and dignity of persons with disabilities. We now have a draft text that will prompt Governments and society to pay more attention to people with disabilities. I urge all nations to sign and ratify that legal instrument — proposed by my country and already endorsed by many of the nations represented here — with a view to creating a world of greater justice, humanity and dignity for all.

Mexico believes in the United Nations — in its present and in its future. We have always worked here in a constructive manner, promoting consensus and harmony and putting forward initiatives to address the greatest challenges of our times.

I would like to thank and pay tribute to the heads of State of Algeria, Australia, Canada, Colombia, Chile, Germany, Japan, Kenya, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Pakistan, Singapore, Spain and Sweden for their support for the Mexican initiative to establish the Group of Friends for United Nations Reform. Together, we presented proposals that were taken up in the Secretary-General's report of March 2005 (A/59/2005).

I am certain that our commitment to reform of the United Nations will result in a stronger Organization that is capable of accomplishing the lofty objectives for which it was created. Mexico is convinced of the need to promote a reform of the Security Council that can guarantee the Council's representativeness, efficacy and transparency, as well as ensure accountability. That objective will not be reached by creating new permanent seats.

We are an Organization based on the principle of the juridical equality of States. The reform of the Security Council should ensure more frequent participation by all Member States in the activities of that body. That is why Mexico proposes an increase in the number of non-permanent seats, with the possibility of immediate re-election.

As this is the last time that I will speaking in the Assembly in my capacity as President of Mexico, I would like to express my gratitude to all Member States for their support for all of our efforts and initiatives over the past six years.

I would like to express my deep appreciation to Secretary-General Kofi Annan, a good friend of Mexico. He will be remembered for his efforts to reform and strengthen this Organization and for his passion for peace and harmony among nations.

I would like to reaffirm my country's unconditional commitment to the objectives of the San Francisco Charter, to the reform process currently under way and to our common quest for a world free from poverty, fear and despair — a world of mutual respect, peace and harmony.

From this rostrum I appeal, on behalf of Mexico, for respect and peace among nations. In particular, I call on the United Nations to continue to promote an effective peace process in the Middle East.

There is no greater enemy or obstacle than hopelessness, unkindness and lack of solidarity. Let us build a future based on the strength of our ideals and values, confident that our United Nations can achieve great things.

In the same spirit that made our peoples free, sovereign, democratic and human-centred nations, I invite the Assembly today to set its sights on a future of greater freedom, justice, brotherhood and solidarity among human beings.

The President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the President of the United Mexican States for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Vicente Fox, President of the United Mexican States, was escorted from the General Assembly Hall.

Address by Mrs. Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, President of the Republic of Liberia

The President: The Assembly will now hear an address by the President of the Republic of Liberia.

Mrs. Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, President of the Republic of Liberia, was escorted into the General Assembly Hall.

The President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations Her Excellency Mrs. Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, President of the Republic of Liberia, and to invite her to address the Assembly.

President Johnson-Sirleaf: It is a great honour for me to address the General Assembly at its sixty-first session on behalf of the people of Liberia, not just in my capacity as a leader, but as the first democratically elected woman President in Liberia and in Africa.

Let me congratulate you, Madam, on your election as President of the General Assembly at this session. We are proud of you, as the first Arab Muslim woman and the third woman to occupy this noble position. One of your women predecessors, Angie Brooks, hailed from Liberia. I was pleased to honour her last Friday in a moving ceremony here in New York for her dedicated services to our country.

Let me also seize this opportunity to pay a well-deserved tribute to your predecessor, Mr. Jan Eliasson of Sweden, for his insightful knowledge and enlightened leadership in steering the affairs of the General Assembly at its sixtieth session.

I wish also to welcome and congratulate the Republic of Montenegro for its admission as the one hundred ninety-second Member of the Organization and to assure its delegation of Liberia's friendship, solidarity and support.

Let me now pay special tribute to Mr. Kofi Annan, the outgoing Secretary-General. I had the privilege of working with him as a former senior staff member of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), and I am personally aware of his dedication and commitment to the Organization, particularly the reform of the United Nations and the strengthening of its institutions. As I said to him during an honouring ceremony in Monrovia in July, we are proud of his record of enhancing the responsibility of the United Nations: the responsibility to protect the poor from the rich; the weak from the strong; and the humble from the arrogant. The Liberian people, and indeed all the people of Africa, are proud of him and his accomplishments.

Sixty-one years ago, when countries gathered in San Francisco to address issues related to the scourge of, and the scars left by, the Second World War, and the need for peace in a post-conflict world, Liberia was there and was a signatory to the Charter of the United Nations. The purposes and principles of the Charter have proved to be of durable value over the years.

Times have changed, and the world, too, has changed, beyond what we could have imagined when the Organization was established. Today we are truly a global village, interconnected physically and electronically, increasingly bound by a shared commitment to confront and overcome the challenges that threaten global peace, stability and the well-being of our human family.

Yet the original aims and objectives of the United Nations remain today as relevant as they were when the Charter of the Organization was signed 61 years ago. The need to maintain international peace and security, to cultivate friendly relations among nations, to achieve international cooperation in solving global economic, cultural, social and humanitarian problems, and to promote respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms constitute, and still remain, the cardinal objectives of the Organization.

Thus the main focus of this year's deliberations — the implementation of a global partnership for development — serves to remind us that at this session the General Assembly must vigorously consider how to bring equity to the present international financial, trade and development structures; how to do more to create the conditions that will improve the standard of living of humankind everywhere; how to be sensitive to the needs of developing countries and assure them the dividends of globalization.

In the new millennium, the United Nations should not operate on the basis of structures designed 61 years ago. We must therefore review the issue of the inequitable representation of the world's peoples, as reflected by the present structure of the Security Council. It is in that regard that reform of the United Nations is urgent, especially with respect to the decision-making process in a Security Council which is undemocratic and hegemonic. The apparent continued violations of the United Nations Charter by some Member States on account of national interests represent a disguised threat to world peace and security.

Hence we must now find an acceptable solution under which nations large and small will receive equal treatment, in consonance with the Charter. The United Nations was conceived to promote world peace, democracy and equity for all.

I strongly support women and gender equality, and I look forward with interest to the report of the High-level Panel on System-wide Coherence, appointed by the Secretary-General earlier this year. It is expected to submit its final recommendations on United Nations reform. It is my hope that the establishment of a new, independent United Nations fund or programme for the empowerment of women and gender equality will be fully supported by Member States, and that such a fund will have sufficient resources to support targeted programmes for the empowerment of women.

Three years ago, representatives of contending warring factions, political parties and civil society in Liberia gathered in Accra under the auspices of international partners and signed the Comprehensive Peace Agreement. Under provisions of that Agreement, a National Transitional Government was installed in October, 2003, with a mandate to disarm combatants and prepare our country for elections. In October and November, 2005, legislative and presidential elections were held, leading to our historic and landmark election by the Liberian people. The United Nations played a pivotal role in that national transformation. For and on behalf of the Liberian people, I wish to thank the United Nations and other international partners for the mammoth role they played in securing peace and bringing sanity to Liberia.

I wish also to express the deep appreciation and gratitude of the people of Liberia and their friends everywhere to the men and women of the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) for their active role in securing and enhancing peace and security in our country. I am proud to say that the leadership, commanders, men and women of the various contingents of UNMIL have largely comported themselves well and performed their mission with diligence and dedication. They have sacrificed greatly and persevered in a very challenging peacekeeping environment. The Special Representative of the Secretary-General deserves particular commendation for his foresight and support of our country's reconstruction efforts. I thank them all sincerely on behalf of the Liberian people.

There are others to whom we owe a huge debt of gratitude. The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the African Union, the United States of America, the European Union and the People's Republic of China have been selfless and generous in their material, financial and moral support of our cause. I would be remiss if I did not single out the sacrifices made by our West African brothers and sisters to bring peace and sensibility to a suffering people. We thank them.

While we are enjoying a semblance of peace, we are particularly concerned about conflicts in other parts of the world. Of notable concern is the protracted crisis in the Middle East, which continues to create a state of restlessness and threatens world peace and security. From our experience, we have learned that no matter how protracted a conflict, the parties must sit around the table to iron out their differences and make peace. Both the Israeli and the Palestinian authorities owe their respective peoples, and the rest of us in the world, an obligation to break out of their cocoon of pride to resolve their differences harmoniously. We call for the active engagement of the United Nations in the peaceful and amicable resolution of the Middle East crisis.

Elsewhere in Africa, and especially in neighbouring Côte d'Ivoire, the standoff in the peace process is troubling. We call on the parties in Côte d'Ivoire to save their people from further punishment by resolving their differences. We call upon the United Nations to continue strong and decisive intervention to prevent it from becoming a wider subregional and regional crisis.

The situation in Darfur and the slow pace with which it is being addressed require urgent attention. The continued stalemate over whether an African Union or a United Nations force should be deployed or maintained in the region exposes weaknesses in international cooperation and collaboration and demonstrates a lack of international will to address the sufferings and yearnings of the citizens and residents of Darfur, who plead everyday for international intervention. Darfur represents a potential humanitarian catastrophe. The world must not allow a second Rwanda to happen. In the new millennium, civilized nations must not be indifferent to any conflict, internal or external, regardless of the factors that fuel it.

The United Nations obligation to protect the helpless and innocent must remain paramount in that regard. My Government therefore calls on this General Assembly and the Security Council to exercise Chapter VII authority to restore peace, security and stability to Darfur.

On the other hand, my delegation is pleased with the successful holding of peaceful democratic elections in the Democratic Republic of Congo for the first time in 40 years. We look forward to seeing a peaceful conclusion of the final stage of that process and the ushering-in of a Government elected by the people of that country. It is our hope that the democratic gains made in the Democratic Republic of the Congo will be sustained to enable the new Government to employ the vast national resources of that country for the benefit and welfare of its people.

Globalization has significantly altered the world and economic transactions among States. Africa will remain on the periphery of the global village unless we, as leaders, awaken to the imperatives of the ever-changing requirements. The first step towards that process of awakening is the promotion of democracy, free enterprise, good governance, human rights and social justice in our countries and across our continent.

There is increasing evidence that shows a direct correlation between the material and moral well-being of a people and their country, and the quality of their democratic environment. My Government is keenly aware of that reality. We have therefore promulgated policies that support openness, transparency, accountability and the equitable distribution of our meagre resources, while endeavouring to address the development and reconstruction challenges of the country.

Five years ago on 11 September, 2001, a few miles from this very Hall, terror of unimaginable proportions struck, shocked the world and claimed close to 3,000 precious and innocent lives. As the people of the United States and the families of the innocent dead remember their tragic and irreparable loss this month, the people of Liberia join me in affirming our identification with their loss. We mourned with them then and we mourn with them now. We also resolve, as all civilized nations should, to join the global effort to fight terrorism anywhere in the world, recognizing that it is today the most signal challenge to world peace and collective freedom.

The world has witnessed a significant achievement in science and technology, leading to rapid industrialization and the improvement of the standards of living of humankind. Although the gains have led to the development of new medicines and other scientific knowledge, they also pose a threat to the environment and human survival.

Rapid industrialization and scientific discoveries can have a damaging impact on the environment. Unless there is a modification in our activities, the pleasure derived from successes in scientific achievement could, sadly, lead to tragedy and doom.

Thus, in the race for modernization and development, we cannot ignore the potency of the threats posed to our survival by environmental degradation. Saving the planet is required for the continued existence of its more than 5 billion inhabitants.

It is in that regard that my delegation supports the efforts of the Commission on Sustainable Development, the Kyoto Protocol and the decision reached on Agenda 21 during the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, intended to raise international awareness about the degradation of the environment and the need to reverse the negative trend. We trust that environmental issues will remain a priority on the global agenda.

Among the many impediments to social and economic development in Africa are poverty, poor health delivery systems, intraregional wars and civil conflicts. The devastating impact of HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases has contributed significantly

to the slowing of progress on the African continent. While countries in the developed world are leaping ahead in science and technology, we are still groping to find the means to combat curable diseases and to join in the search to address incurable ones.

The twenty-fifth anniversary of the emergence of HIV/AIDS brought into focus the recognition that that deadly virus has eluded the sophistication of science and technology, thereby posing one of the greatest challenges to our development effort. The political will of Africa is challenged to act speedily to eradicate the virus and combat this health crisis.

The Government of Liberia welcomes the partial lifting of the arms embargo and the ban on timber imposed by Security Council resolution 1521 (2003). We also look forward to the lifting of the ban on diamonds as we seek to meet the requirements of Council resolution 1343 (2001). My Government pledges its fullest cooperation in the attainment of the objectives set out in those resolutions. We remain grateful to the international community for the continuous assistance and support provided to our country in its search for peace, security and post-war reconstruction and development.

Today, I stand here in testimony to the rebirth of my country — to our re-emergence to assume once more our enviable and critical role as one of the first independent African republics. We are aware that we face awesome challenges: the challenge of rebuilding our infrastructure, including education, health and other institutions; the challenge of addressing generations of gender imbalance, especially as it relates to the education of the girl child; and the challenge of promoting democracy, participation and fundamental freedoms and rights in an environment of equal opportunity.

We have made important beginnings, and we remain encouraged by the bilateral support provided by our bilateral and multilateral international partners. The recent visit of the Secretary-General and other similarly important visits by leaders of our continent and of international financial institutions clearly underscore the commitment of the United Nations and the rest of the international community to working with our Government to nurture and strengthen peace and to foster development.

In closing, let me say that today, as in the past, Liberia wishes to reaffirm its commitment to the United Nations, this timeworn but irreplaceable machinery and indispensable framework for international peace and international relations. We must all join our steadfast forces to make this institution work for the good of humankind.

The President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the President of the Republic of Liberia for the statement she has just made.

Mrs. Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, President of the Republic of Liberia, was escorted from the General Assembly Hall.

Address by His Majesty King Abdullah Bin Al Hussein, King of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): The Assembly will now hear an address by the King of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan.

King Abdullah Bin Al Hussein, King of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, was escorted into the General Assembly Hall.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations His Majesty King Abdullah Bin Al Hussein, King of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, and to invite him to address the Assembly.

King Abdullah Bin Al Hussein: May I extend the warmest congratulations to you, Sheikha Haya, on your election as President of the General Assembly. Allow me also to say a word of gratitude and admiration to Secretary-General Kofi Annan. Jordan applauds the progress achieved in United Nations reform under Secretary-General Annan's tenure. In particular, we welcome the recent creation of the Human Rights Council and of the Peacebuilding Commission.

I come before the Assembly today with a deep sense of urgency. Never has it been more important for the world community to act decisively for peace in my region. The recent crisis in the Middle East is a crisis for all nations. There can be no just global order when aggression and occupation are permitted to take the place of international law. When these occur in a region as strategic as the Middle East, the shockwaves run worldwide. Our young people are asking, where is the justice, where is the will, of the global community? We must answer them by establishing a lasting peace

based on the international legality that we have pledged to uphold.

That means a new focus on the core problem. The region's contemporary crises are outgrowths of a central grievance felt throughout the Middle East and, indeed, the world. That grievance, plain and simple, is Israeli occupation and the denial, over decades, of Palestinian rights. Until we end that wrong, conflict will breed more conflict, year after year.

The Middle East conflict has repeatedly come before this institution. And the United Nations position has been repeatedly articulated in resolutions condemning aggression and occupation, affirming Palestinian self-determination and supporting a process for peace. Yet, each year without progress has brought us another crisis, more suffering and more division. It is time to take a better path.

We must, of course, respond immediately to help those who suffer the terrible destruction of conflict. In Lebanon we must ensure that the Government can extend its sovereignty and control over all Lebanese territory. The Arab world and the international community must make every effort and must support reconstruction and development. Those are vital measures; but in the Middle East they are only partial measures.

We can solve the Arab-Israeli conflict only by addressing the issue at its core: the restoration of internationally recognized Palestinian rights. In 2002, the 22 Arab States — agreeing unanimously — led the way with a breakthrough peace proposal. Our vision and our commitment is a viable and independent Palestinian State living side by side with a secure Israel. Under the Arab peace initiative, Israel's security would be guaranteed and the occupation of Palestine would end, in accordance with United Nations resolutions.

Events show clearly that there can be no unilateral solution to the conflict. There must be a genuine partnership among all parties, in the context of international legality and justice.

Such a global partnership for peace is directly connected to the global partnership for development. Around the world, nations at peace are moving forward with economic growth and development: investing in education, building communities and helping to shape the future of the world. But no nation succeeds in isolation. All nations and all people — especially our young people — must be able to share in a promising future.

We must make peace a priority. We must do so now. No session of this great institution could make a greater contribution to a future of justice and hope.

The President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the King of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan for the statement he has just made.

His Majesty King Abdullah Bin Al Hussein, King of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, was escorted from the General Assembly Hall.

Mr. Wali (Nigeria), Vice-President, took the Chair.

Address by Mr. John Agyekum Kufuor, President of the Republic of Ghana

The Acting President: The Assembly will now hear an address by the President of the Republic of Ghana.

Mr. John Agyekum Kufuor, President of the Republic of Ghana, was escorted into the General Assembly Hall.

The Acting President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations His Excellency Mr. John Agyekum Kufuor, President of the Republic of Ghana, and to invite him to address the Assembly.

President Kufuor: Ghana, like many other nations here, is delighted and feels proud that a distinguished lady endowed with excellent diplomatic skills has been elected to the presidency of this body. We have no doubt that she will continue the skilful stewardship of her predecessor, Mr. Jan Eliasson, the Foreign Minister of Sweden, who presided over the sixtieth session of the General Assembly.

Ghana would also like to welcome the Republic of Montenegro as the 192nd Member of the United Nations, and looks forward to the day when the Organization will attain full global and universal membership.

A year ago, we met at this historic venue to adopt the 2005 World Summit Outcome Document (resolution 60/1), in which we acknowledged that peace and security and development and human rights

were the pillars of the United Nations system and the foundations of our collective well-being. We also recognized that those pillars were interlinked and mutually reinforcing and that, while each country had the primary responsibility for its own development, individual efforts should be complemented by supportive global programmes, measures and policies aimed at expanding development opportunities, especially for developing countries.

Ghana therefore attaches the utmost importance to the Summit's decision that developing countries should adopt and begin to implement by 2006 such requisite national strategies as would enable them to achieve the goals and objectives that have been agreed upon, including the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Ghana has therefore been working relentlessly towards that end, in the firm belief that our development partners, both bilateral and multilateral, will support us in our efforts to improve the living conditions of our people. For effective implementation, all concerned must show commitment and dispatch.

Ghana recognizes good governance as crucial to sustainable development. We have therefore worked assiduously at establishing a robust culture of democracy, sound economic management and adherence to the rule of law. The free and fair elections that have been held successfully in Ghana over the past 15 years bear eloquent testimony to the determination of Ghanaians to create an equitable, free and stable society in which each individual can develop his or her full potential. The media, freed from intimidating legislation, have blossomed into a vibrant watchdog for the probity and accountability expected of the governors and the responsibility expected of the citizens.

It is against that background that Ghana readily submitted itself to the African Peer Review Mechanism under the New Partnership for Africa's Development to have an objective assessment of its institutional structures and their functioning for the improvement of its governance.

But our collective objective within this Organization to alleviate the economic plight of the majority of mankind may continue to elude us unless the pursuit of international peace and security is effectively and satisfactorily addressed. Ghana therefore views with grave concern the continuing spread and persistence of terrorist activities. The international community must rally to contain and effectively eradicate that menace to mankind.

In that regard, the Secretary-General's proposal for a Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy is welcome. Indeed, it is the view of Ghana that there must be a quick conclusion of the deliberations on the proposed comprehensive convention on international terrorism.

Yet another scourge to the security of the world are the snail-paced talks on the elimination of nuclear weapons and the added threat of the proliferation of those weapons. Ghana shares the concerns of the majority of Member States that this body must continue with and intensify its pressure for the total elimination of those weapons, for as long as 27,000 nuclear weapons continue to exist, as they do now, our world will remain vulnerable to the threat of mass destruction.

We make this appeal not unaware of the positive uses of nuclear energy, but so long as those nations which already possess these weapons and those on the verge of breaking into the mastery of the technology do not show transparency with their know-how, the world will feel insecure. So Ghana appeals to such nations to show candour and transparency in their cooperation with the International Atomic Energy Agency by their compliance with the terms of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons.

The spread of small arms and light weapons is yet another scourge, especially for Africa. This Organization's collective efforts to rein in that menace since 2001 have indeed yielded significant results. However, we are still far from achieving the desired target. That was borne out by the outcome of the recent Review Conference of the United Nations Programme of Action. Ghana therefore welcomes the current momentum within the international community to move closer to the ultimate goal of drastically removing the menace.

Without a doubt, the United Nations responsibility for maintaining international peace and security has been tremendously facilitated by peacekeeping operations in many troubled spots around the world. Ghana has been a dedicated and regular contributor to those operations. It is thus committed because of its conviction that the lack of peace and stability in any country can have far-reaching negative repercussions beyond its immediate borders. We therefore commend moves to enhance the United

Nations peacekeeping activities that bring hope to victims of conflict.

African nations are more and more demonstrating their proactive commitment to the management and resolution of conflicts on their continent. That is why Ghana commends and supports the Secretary-General's determination to take the necessary measures to effect the envisaged close partnership between the Organization and the African Union in that sphere, with particular reference to Darfur, in order to save the many lives threatened by the looming crisis there. Deepening Africa's peacekeeping capacity to meet that challenging mission through training, logistical and financial support is crucial to the success of that goal. The decision taken at the 2005 World Summit in that regard must therefore be expeditiously implemented.

A monumental product of the Summit was the birth of the Peacebuilding Commission, of which Ghana is a member. Our expectation is that the 30-member Commission will discharge its functions diligently. Another significant milestone achieved by this Organization was the establishment of the Human Rights Council. I must express appreciation to this Assembly for electing Ghana with the highest number of votes to the Council.

The many resolutions and the launching of various Commissions clearly indicate the determination of our Organization to make the world a better and safer place for mankind. The truth is, however, that if this desire is to be actualized, the United Nations must undergo more radical reforms and be better equipped to effectively implement its decisions. Such a streamlined Organization will create the critical mass for tackling effectively the many challenges that threaten international peace and security. Thus, the debate to reform the Security Council based on the principles of democracy, the sovereign equality of States and equitable geographical representation, among others, is very much in order and must be supported.

Permit me at this stage to try to discharge an honourable duty that I feel uniquely placed to undertake. That is to pay tribute to the Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, who is my compatriot and my friend, at the end of his exemplary tenure. He has brought much honour and distinction to our nation, Ghana, by his excellent stewardship of the United Nations over the past 10 years. Indeed, his entire adult career over the past 40 years has been at the exclusive service of this Organization, through the ranks of which he rose until he attained the pinnacle 10 years ago. His dedicated and illustrious service during the first 30 years led to his historic election as the first-ever career officer to become Secretary-General.

Destiny also marked him out as the Secretary-General to see out the last century and also usher the Organization into the twenty-first century. It cannot be disputed that these 10 years of his tenure have witnessed the phenomenal acceleration of the world in the process towards globalization. He can also claim some credit for having succeeded in shepherding our Organization deftly through the complicated and transformational challenges that the times confronted it with. He has been able to provide this masterful leadership not only through competent administration, but also in ideas as well as lofty humanistic ideals. His vision for a more proactive Organization, able to respond to the challenges of the twenty-first century, has been lucidly published in his report "In larger freedom: towards development, security and human rights for all".

He is a much decorated personality all over the world, and his winning the Nobel Peace Prize especially attests to the quality of the human being he is. There is no doubt that he retires with an enviable legacy of contributing immensely to shaping the destiny of this Organization and the affairs of the world. Ghana is proud of him and looks forward to receiving him heroically at home. I say to him in our language "*Ayekoo*", meaning "well done!"

The Acting President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the President of the Republic of Ghana for the statement he has just made.

Mr. John Agyekum Kufuor, President of the Republic of Ghana, was escorted from the General Assembly Hall.

Address by Mr. Moritz Leuenberger, President of the Swiss Confederation

The Acting President: The Assembly will now hear an address by His Excellency Mr. Moritz Leuenberger, President of the Swiss Confederation.

Mr. Moritz Leuenberger, President of the Swiss Confederation, was escorted into the General Assembly Hall.

The Acting President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations His Excellency Mr. Moritz Leuenberger, President of the Swiss Confederation, and to invite him to address the Assembly.

President Leuenberger (*spoke in French*): We recently celebrated the fiftieth anniversary of the death of Albert Einstein. He recommended the construction of the atomic bomb to President Roosevelt, yet always described himself as a militant pacifist. He shared his qualms of conscience with Sigmund Freud. In the course of their correspondence, the two men agreed in particular that, if all peoples were to live in peace on this planet, the world needed an international organization with which all people could identify. Empathy towards that organization could provide it with the authority to counter war. It was in that conviction and with the same emotion that the men and women of my country voted in favour of Switzerland's accession to the United Nations almost five years ago.

Today, I affirm that we are glad to have taken that step.

Switzerland may not have experienced war within its own borders for a number of centuries, but that is not enough to satisfy us, for war is not only there where bombs fall, killing men, women and children. We are all involved in the conflicts that ravage our planet. So long as these wars continue, no one can talk convincingly of peace. We can overcome that feeling of powerlessness in the face of armed conflict by joining together to work towards peace. The country that I have the honour to represent is convinced that the United Nations is the most important means of pursuing that vision. The United Nations embodies our hopes for peace, solidarity and justice throughout the world.

Only through a common alliance of all nations do we have that opportunity. No country is capable of meeting the challenges of globalization alone. War, terrorism, drug trafficking, the offshoring of jobs and environmental and climate-related disasters are all global threats. They know no borders, not even those of powerful nations. No State, not even the strongest, is the master of its own fate. Only through an inclusive network with universally applicable norms can might and violence be replaced by justice. The United Nations has been the world's most successful effort to achieve that end.

Every nation and every community is guided by its own historical and cultural experiences in dealing with conflicts. Nations behave and organize themselves accordingly. In Switzerland, our values are based on the three pillars of democracy, the rule of law and social equilibrium. That influences our view of how the international community could address conflicts worldwide by helping the victims of violence or disaster, establishing a legal system and enforcing it, and examining the deeper causes of violence and seeking to redress them.

The first reaction of a human being towards a suffering victim is to help that person. The United Nations has stood by victims of natural disasters with humanitarian assistance, be it after a tsunami or in a drought. It also assists people affected by war. In so doing, it has succeeded in building up positive empathy and in strengthening trust in it worldwide.

Should the United Nations fail in its humanitarian task, however, desperation and the tendency towards violence increase and intensify conflicts. That can be seen with brutal clarity in the Middle East and in Darfur.

Why should the international community not establish norms just like a State does? I refer here to the Millennium Development Goals, human rights, the climate change Protocol and international law. States have adopted penal codes to prosecute criminals, bring them before a court, sentence them and have their sentence enforced. Doing justice to victims prevents acts of vengeance and a never-ending spiral of further violence. It also serves as a deterrent to potential criminals.

What is good for a State should also be good for the international community. It must treat war criminals according to the same rules. The international community has to fight terrorism. There is no alternative to absolute respect for the rule of law, human rights and international law. The Geneva Conventions are no hindrance to that; on the contrary, if the appropriate instruments are lacking, new ones can be created, such as the convention on terrorism. Above all, however, we must not betray our principles and our values. Torture or any other illegal procedure has no place in our struggle and represents the radical negation of the rule of law. Recourse to such means strips the fight against terrorism of all its legitimacy.

The establishment of the International Criminal Court (ICC) was a key date in the history of humanity. It is in this Court that war criminals are tried, found guilty and sentenced. Unfortunately, the process can sometimes take a long time, as we have seen in the case of Liberia, and sometimes it can take far too much time, as in the case of the Balkans. War criminals must be extradited so that justice can be done. All war criminals, including those from the Darfur conflict, must be made aware of the consequences of their crimes and know that they will not go unpunished.

Respect for the law implies that all States, from the smallest to the largest, become parties to the ICC Statute. Public international law, while it is of fundamental importance for small countries which are unable to defend themselves on their own, also serves the interests of large States, and even super-Powers, if they do not want to find themselves accused of arbitrary acts of imperialism.

We all know that no State can function purely on the basis of laws and ordinances. Laws and ordinances must have the full support of the public. The same is true for the United Nations. That is why the Human Rights Council in Geneva will search for solutions through dialogue partnerships rather than by issuing threats. That will take time, a great deal of time. The existence of the Peacebuilding Commission at the United Nations clearly shows that the United Nations peacekeepers cannot bring about or enforce peace by themselves. There need to be blueprints for peace and expert evaluations, together with a long-term "variable-geometry" commitment on the part of the international community, in order to prevent conflicts.

Critics who believed that the United Nations was incapable of reform now have before them proof to the contrary. By establishing a Human Rights Council and a Peacebuilding Commission, the United Nations has demonstrated that it wanted to give new life to values such as the protection of human rights and that it could develop new peacekeeping instruments.

Just as a democracy strives to involve all its citizens in political decisions, regardless of their background or financial standing, the United Nations must not allow small groups of States or individual States to impose their law on others. A broad consensus must prevail. That is why we would like to see the reform and enlargement of the Security Council, which would undoubtedly strengthen its legitimacy. Given that we have still a long way to go before that point is reached, let us, rather, remain pragmatic and content ourselves with short-term improvements to the Council's working methods, in particular, the right of veto.

Every State will try to find the underlying causes of threats to its cohesion and endeavour to overcome them, and so it is with a community of States.

Environmental disasters give rise to mass migration and legions of refugees. The signatories of the Kyoto Protocol want to cut off this evil at the root. But, here again, all States, without exception, must set for themselves the same goals as were set at Kyoto and, above all, take appropriate measures.

Every military conflict and every terrorist attack stems from economic inequalities and social injustices. That is why we must do our utmost to fight poverty, lack of future prospects and political impotence.

Religious conflicts are also born of economic and social inequalities. In reality, the East-West divide is perhaps more a North-South divide. If we want to promote religious tolerance, we must pay the price, which is greater social and economic justice. By adopting the Millennium Development Goals, the world has set itself the task of reducing extreme poverty by half by 2015. Let us give ourselves and the United Nations the means for keeping that promise.

It is through dialogue that it is possible to address the conflict in the Middle East, the stabilization of Iraq and the nuclear crisis with Iran, and all the parties concerned should do everything they can to avoid fanning the flames of discord. Respect for the basic principles of the Charter of the United Nations is just as essential. In other words, no State is entitled to deny the right of another to exist. Lastly, we cannot disappoint those who aspire to self-determination if they have the law on their side.

When there is a clash of cultures, the response must be dialogue between cultures and between religions. We have no other choice. Humiliation and lack of respect for other cultures undoubtedly serve as breeding grounds for terrorism. Since all States are represented here, the United Nations is a forum unlike any other. We are looking forward to the issuance of the report on the alliance of civilizations by the High-level Group appointed by the Secretary-General. Switzerland will be very active in this endeavour.

Switzerland is a neutral country. Our neutrality has never authorized us to look upon the world with indifference or to stand on the sidelines. It has always meant that we have the obligation to work to establish peace. We have never wanted to be, and have never been, neutral towards victims of oppression and violence or the rules of the international community and of international law. The only legitimate ally of a neutral country is public international law. Neutrality means refusing all forms of hegemony and championing the peaceful coexistence of all countries, which all enjoy equal rights. That is how Switzerland understands neutrality and how it intends to exercise it here.

As I said at the outset, Albert Einstein concluded that the empathy that people would come to feel for community institutions could become the means to prevent war. But how is such empathy brought about? It develops thanks to people who, in word and deed, commit themselves in these institutions and thereby generate optimism about justice and peace.

Secretary-General Kofi Annan is one of these people. He has given the United Nations the face it has today, thank to his commitment in all areas of United Nations activity, sometimes in the most delicate of situations. We are greatly indebted to him, and we ask him to accept our very sincere thanks. Switzerland is particularly grateful for his personal involvement in support of our country's joining the United Nations. And yes, I confirm once again today, we are glad that we took that step.

The Acting President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the President of the Swiss Confederation for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Moritz Leuenberger, President of the Swiss Confederation, was escorted from the General Assembly Hall.

Address by Mr. José Manuel Zelaya Rosales, President of the Republic of Honduras

The Acting President: The Assembly will now hear an address by the President of the Republic of Honduras.

Mr. José Manuel Zelaya Rosales, President of the Republic of Honduras, was escorted into the General Assembly Hall.

The Acting President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations His Excellency Mr. José Manuel Zelaya Rosales, President of the Republic of Honduras, and to invite him to address the Assembly.

President Zelaya Rosales (*spoke in Spanish*): I feel very honoured to be the emissary of the Honduran people, who send to all at this General Assembly brotherly, warm and effusive greetings on the occasion of the sixty-first session of the Assembly.

We come here today before the representatives of the nations of the world to merge the larger part of our dreams and hopes in order, together, to achieve the greatest goals for world peace. Our high aspirations, along with the worthiness of the members of the Assembly, are part of humanity's common purpose of attaining international law and justice.

But we also have to recognize that there are things that are difficult to understand in an environment that is supposed to be conducive to peace and development: the contrast we see among different latitudes of the Earth; the immense needs of peoples; the contrast of poverty; drums of war that resound everywhere; nuclear threats; cruel situations for nations and peoples.

Rather than narrowing, social divides have grown wider in recent decades. Morality is not being combined with economy or science. Morality is moving away from the principles and values of a just and true God. That is why our presence in this important Assembly is needed to focus clearly on the fact that humanity needs to seek its objectives according to healthy principles that will dignify our peoples.

When the last half of the twentieth century came to an end, we sincerely believed that we had put an end to political, ideological and religious tyrannies. But today we see them cropping up again, together with the tyrannies of trade, which are often more cruel than the others. Today, they want to sell us a free-market policy, but ultimately that is a ruthless, insensitive economic policy that is protectionist for many sectors. Instead of opening the door to a social approach to the market, where freedom is for people, we only have freedom for investment, and we forget about individuals and citizens and the rights of women and children, the most vulnerable groups who, although lacking in power, yearn for a better life.

Certainly, we need to have protection, but not just protection for investments and big capital. We also need protection for the vulnerable of the world: for children and young people, for farmers who sow their small plots; for those businesspeople who cannot get a foothold on the ladder of international trade; for the owners of microenterprises who are reaching out in search for the well-being and dignity they deserve.

All of us, of course, want a free market, but an ethical one. We want to live in a globalized world — but one in which respect for identity, patriotism and the dignity and sovereignty of peoples are also global. So we are here to denounce hypocrisy, double-talk and moral double standards on the part of those who proclaim and promote a solution to our problems through democracy and free trade, but who seize and hold hostage the concepts of internal and external spaces and promote a system of privileges, oligopolies and monopolies, half-truths and flawed markets that they hold captive. They are insensitive to the demands of the majority, very often tortured by hunger, unemployment, indifference and exclusion.

We have come to this Assembly to wish everyone the best, but also to point the finger at those who preach false free trade that only deepens poverty and seek to seduce us with the erratic mirage of remittances that we so easily accept but which in fact are the fruit of a labour force that we have exported; the result of the cruel fate of our emigrants; the inexorable and evil tragedy of people caught between freedom, marginalization and slavery.

My Government and the people of Honduras condemn the monopolistic controls, the privileges and the absurd exceptions that prevent us from building true freedom with democracy and market access, the paradigm that we all want to move towards without the protectionism we all condemn.

The Governments of the world must be led by men and women who long for peace and not by multinational corporations that promote war. Here, civil society organizations could play a major role in correcting this situation and denouncing it.

I represent Honduras, a country of the Isthmus of Central America, and, like our Central American brothers and sisters, we continue to face the innumerable paradoxes that arise between civilization and barbarism. We have been the historical theatre of absurd wars, ambitions and sterile battles, very often exported, and the horrors of death and pillage. Yet the peoples of Central America are in the vanguard of those looking for joint solutions. We have the creative capacity that keeps us from losing faith or hope in a better world.

America has been inspired throughout history by great men and women of renown. Here in North America, Lincoln was a splendid guide for democracy. In the South, it was Sucre, San Martin and Bolivar; José Martí in the Caribbean; Villa and Zapata in Mexico. And in Central America, we have Jerez, Mora, Valle, Darío, Turcios, Omar Torrijos and the pro-union martyr Francisco Morazán, among others. The Chilean poet, Pablo Neruda, Nobel laureate for literature, said it well:

> "Deep in the night Morazán is watchful.
> Is it today? Yesterday? Tomorrow? You know the answer,
> Central ribbon, slender America,
> ...
> Raised up on emerald sea-feathers:
> Territory, unity, slim goddess
> Born in the water-foam battle.
>
> They destroy your sons, and worms
> Spread their pestilence over you.
> ...
> Now comes the axe-brandishing tiger.
> They come to devour your entrails.
> They come, fragrant little America,
> To nail you to the cross, to flay you,
> To cast down the metal blazoned on your banner.
>
> Invaders fill your dwelling-place
> And toss you aside like lifeless fruit.
> ...
> And others plunder your ports ...
>
> Is it today? Yesterday? Tomorrow? You know the answer.
>
> Brothers, awaken. And Morazán is watchful."

We, the Central American peoples, stand tall, ready to take the opportunities offered by development and genuine free trade, seeking our common destiny, seeking it today — which is not the end of history, but the beginning of a new era for humanity, if we shoulder our responsibility and commitment. We have not lost our desire for liberty or our longing for hope. We continue to fight for food security, for energy independence, for the social morality that we all

deserve and for an economy that is at the service of markets, yes, but also at the service of people. We form a common front against poverty and against the corruption which today is invading our culture at many levels. Unless we overcome this, we cannot win genuine sovereignty.

Central America opens itself to the world so that the world can open itself to Central America. We are prepared for investment in tourism and in various areas of our economy and society. We are ready in Central America — El Salvador, Guatemala, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, Panama, Belize and now the Dominican Republic. We represent this central waistband of America, this bridge of trade and markets — a bridge to a free world, a better world.

Time limitations prevent me from addressing all the other important topics. Allow me to conclude this brief statement by expressing wishes for true peace and opportunity for everyone, in the conviction that the peoples of the world can exist only when in the heart of man there is fear of the wisdom of God.

Let us all say yes to the loving God, to that God that considers man a brother to man and not an enemy of man — to that God of non-violence. That is the God we hymn and glorify, and we in Central America and Honduras join together in a song of hope:

> "Is it today? Yesterday? Tomorrow? You know the answer.
>
> Brothers, awaken. And Morazán is watchful."

The Acting President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the President of the Republic of Honduras for the statement he has just made.

Mr. José Manuel Zelaya Rosales, President of the Republic of Honduras, was escorted from the General Assembly Hall.

Address by Mr. Tassos Papadopoulos, President of the Republic of Cyprus

The Acting President: The Assembly will now hear an address by the President of the Republic of Cyprus.

Mr. Tassos Papadopoulos, President of the Republic of Cyprus, was escorted into the General Assembly Hall.

The Acting President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations His Excellency Mr. Tassos Papadopoulos, President of the Republic of Cyprus, and to invite him to address the Assembly.

President Papadopoulos: Before proceeding with my remarks, I wish to indicate that Cyprus, as a member of the European Union, is represented by the Union and fully subscribes to the statement delivered this morning by the President of Finland on behalf of the European Union. I should also like to express my sincere congratulations to Ms. Haya Rashed Al-Khalifa on her election as President of this session of the General Assembly, and my gratitude to Mr. Jan Eliasson, President during the sixtieth session, for his tireless efforts during a historic year for the United Nations. I also wish to thank the Secretary-General for his comprehensive report on the work of the Organization (A/61/1), highlighting the problems, the concerns and the achievements of the United Nations and providing guidance on the way forward. I would like moreover to warmly welcome the Republic of Montenegro as the 192nd Member of the United Nations.

During the session that followed the 2005 World Summit, implementation of the Summit Outcome Document (resolution 60/1), and the reform process more generally, absorbed an important part of the work of the Organization. The establishment of the Peacebuilding Commission and the Human Rights Council, alongside other important achievements, constitutes an important building block towards a consolidated international system based on effective multilateralism. We should, however, not lose sight of the fact that the legitimacy and the relevance of the reform achieved will be judged by its impact on the lives of our peoples. In that respect, let me underline that as a country whose priority lies with upholding the integrity of international law and full respect for human rights, we have a strong interest in seeing a Human Rights Council that fulfils its mandate and leads to human rights improvements on the ground.

There are also aspects of reform that continue to elude us, such as Security Council reform and a comprehensive convention against terrorism; aspects that remain in progress, such as management reform, mandate review and system-wide coherence; and challenges that are increasingly more difficult to tackle, such as disarmament and non-proliferation.

In that regard, I would like to commend the President of the General Assembly for choosing the achievement of the development goals as the theme of her presidency in recognition of their enduring importance. My Government believes that concerted, innovative multilateral action to eradicate the scourges deriving from poverty and underdevelopment can yield substantial results. In that connection, Cyprus has joined France, Brazil, Chile, Norway, the United Kingdom and other countries in deciding to introduce a special levy on air tickets, the proceeds of which will fund improved access to medication in developing countries.

Regrettably, the urgent need to achieve a comprehensive and lasting peace in the Middle East manifested itself in a very dramatic manner once again this summer. For almost four weeks, the international community witnessed a violent crisis in Lebanon that caused indescribable suffering, devastation and a deplorably high number of casualties among civilians. We offer our sympathy and concern to the Governments of Lebanon and Israel and to the families of all those affected.

Firmly convinced that there is no military solution to such crises, Cyprus, from the very first moment of the outbreak of violence, supported the calls for an immediate ceasefire and joined in the effort to provide assistance both to the Lebanese people and to the evacuees. Unfortunately, it took almost a month for the Security Council to discharge its responsibilities effectively towards the peoples of the region, causing disappointment and frustration. In our search for United Nations-centred, effective multilateralism, the lessons learned from that crisis should be a strong guiding force. We hope that the expanded United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon, to whose deployment, operations and support Cyprus has undertaken to contribute, will be effective in preventing future eruptions of violence.

In parallel to the Lebanese crisis, the world continues to witness the deterioration of the situation in the occupied Palestinian territories, with a heavy civilian toll and worsening humanitarian conditions. A year after the positive prospects created by Israeli disengagement from Gaza, the current crises serve as a reminder of the urgent need for a new strategy that would lead to a comprehensive and lasting settlement of all facets of the Middle East question on the basis of relevant United Nations resolutions. In that respect, it is imperative to urgently revert to the implementation of international agreements, including the road map, providing for the creation of a viable Palestinian State that will peacefully coexist side by side with Israel within agreed borders.

Let me now turn to the Cyprus problem — a problem of the invasion and continuing occupation by Turkish military forces of 37 per cent of the territory of my country for more than 32 years now. Mistaken by some for a protracted conflict, the Cyprus problem essentially epitomizes the inability of the international community to redress this set of massive violations of international legality. The status quo remains unchanged and the humanitarian and human rights consequences of the forcible division of the island and its people persist. The efforts to establish a separate political and legal entity within the occupied area of Cyprus by the occupying Power remain undiminished. Only with respect to investigating the fate of persons missing since the invasion and establishing the circumstances of their disappearance have we recently witnessed some encouraging developments.

In the political field, we have continued to exert efforts on two key axes, coming closer to a negotiating process that would guarantee a peaceful settlement, alleviate the consequences of the invasion and bring about the reunification of Cyprus, its territory, people, society, economy and institutions in a bizonal, bicommunal federation.

The political agenda of projecting a separate political entity in Cyprus has been pursued in recent years under the pretext of a campaign to lift the so-called isolation of the Turkish Cypriot community. However, with the annual per capita income in the occupied areas of Cyprus currently standing at approximately $11,000, it is evident that the argument for economic development is being exploited for political reasons and is a manifestly unsubstantiated allegation. A recent example of that pattern of behaviour is the refusal of the Turkish side to consider our proposal to increase trading activity by reopening the port of Famagusta for exports to other States members of the European Union, in cooperation with the European Commission, following the return of the now fenced-off and derelict city of Famagusta to its lawful inhabitants under the control of the Cyprus Government.

The Greek Cypriots remain committed to reunification through a functional bizonal, bicommunal federation. The failure of the most recent initiative did not alter our commitment or our willingness to work resolutely towards the reunification of our country. The proposed plan was not accepted precisely because it did not provide for the reunification of our divided country or address core issues and key concerns in a satisfactory manner. The search for a settlement firmly remains for us in the United Nations framework, within the context of the good offices mission mandated to the Secretary-General by the Security Council.

I would now like to turn briefly to developments of a political nature that have taken place over the past few months and to our attempts during that time to create the right conditions for the resumption of meaningful negotiations in the framework of the good offices mission of the Secretary-General for a viable settlement of the Cyprus problem. To that end, I wish to emphasize our concurrence with the opinion of the Secretary-General that good and careful preparation of any negotiating process is necessary before full-fledged negotiations can take place. It was thus agreed that bicommunal discussions at the technical level would commence to address substantive aspects of the Cyprus problem, as well as issues that affect the everyday life of all Cypriots as long as the status quo persists — a process that could be complemented by parallel confidence-building. This expert-level process is a sine qua non for the preparation of issues and their presentation to the leaders of the two communities for the purpose of meaningful negotiation. The method of initiating these technical discussions was agreed to by the two communities during the recent visit to Cyprus of Under-Secretary-General Gambari. Here, I wish to express my sincere gratitude and appreciation for the good offices of Mr. Gambari, as well as for the continuing efforts of the Secretary-General's Special Representative, Mr. Michael Møller.

Addressing these core issues — which must be settled satisfactorily if there is to be a feasible solution — should facilitate the attainment of the broader objectives of a settlement, which should be based on international law, the relevant United Nations resolutions, the high-level agreements, the European Union acquis and the relevant decisions of the European Court of Human Rights. That entails establishing a bicommunal and bizonal federal State of Cyprus with a single sovereignty and international personality and with a single citizenship. It must also guarantee the independence and territorial integrity of Cyprus, without any foreign troops on its soil and without the possibility of foreign intervention. A settlement must aim, through a rational approach and a common vision of the future, to preserve and uphold the character of the State as a working democracy and to ensure the reunification of society and the convergence of allegiances to common institutions. Ethnic origin, political equality as defined in the relevant United Nations resolutions, and cultural and religious diversity should be safeguarded, but not at the expense of the fundamental rights of citizens and the functionality and efficiency of State institutions.

We had hoped that by now, Turkey's course of accession to the European Union would have had a catalytic effect, producing the necessary political will on the part of Turkey and changing its perception of Cyprus from that of an adversary to that of a partner, a valuable neighbour and a potential ally in the European Union. Such a change in attitude would render completely anachronistic those considerations that have led the country to maintain its occupation army in Cyprus and that fuel its confrontational approach.

We continue to expect Turkey to at least proceed with the implementation of its legally binding obligations vis-à-vis the European Union. This is a unique opportunity for Turkey to prove its willingness to turn the page by meeting obligations that it undertook years ago. Unfortunately, it has so far persistently refused to comply with them. Instead, our generous attitude towards Turkey's accession to the European Union has met with a blockade against my country in its bid to join several international and regional organizations and with Turkey's refusal to open its ports and airports to Cypriot vessels, as required.

We still believe that in our relations with Turkey, there is only one way forward: creating a future of peace and cooperation, building bridges and mutual understanding, normalizing our relations and working hand in hand to achieve the goals of the European Union in our region. That would also enable us to address all outstanding issues to the benefit of all — especially the Turkish Cypriot community, which would have major opportunities to thrive and flourish if Turkey were to accept and acknowledge that it has no vested interests in Cyprus and must therefore relinquish all forms of interference in my country's

affairs. Once again, I invite Turkey to recognize that there is no room for military doctrines with regard to Cyprus and to join us in seeking a lasting solution for the benefit of all Cypriots — Greek and Turkish Cypriots alike — of Turkey and of our entire region.

The Acting President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the President of the Republic of Cyprus for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Tassos Papadopoulos, President of the Republic of Cyprus, was escorted from the General Assembly Hall.

Address by Mr. Óscar Arias Sánchez, President of the Republic of Costa Rica

The Acting President: The Assembly will now hear an address by the President of the Republic of Costa Rica.

Mr. Óscar Arias Sánchez, President of the Republic of Costa Rica, was escorted into the General Assembly Hall.

The Acting President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations His Excellency Mr. Óscar Arias Sánchez, President of the Republic of Costa Rica, and to invite him to address the Assembly.

President Arias Sánchez (*spoke in Spanish*): On behalf of the people of Costa Rica, I convey my greetings to the President of the General Assembly and wish her every success. I also greet the Secretary-General, Kofi Annan, Nobel Peace laureate and tireless defender of dialogue and understanding among the peoples of the Earth.

I come before the Assembly overwhelmed by the same emotion and the same sense of urgency as I felt when I did so for the first time, 20 years ago. Then, I came burdened with the deepest distress of my people. I came to remind the world that, in the "waist of America", five small nations were engaged in a struggle between life and death, between freedom and oppression, between war and peace. I came to ask the international community not to let violence turn Central America into a barren land where the seeds of the most beautiful human dreams could not grow.

The world has changed since then. The finest children of Central America no longer inherit war as their birthright, and our countries have ceased to be pawns in the immense global chess game of the cold war.

For Central Americans, it is impossible to think that the old days were better. I am convinced that humanity has reasons to be optimistic and that, as William Faulkner said, man will prevail. But I also know that the progress made towards human freedom, dignity and well-being are no more than small victories in a long and epic battle. We have just set out on the road towards the full realization of human beings, and it is strewn with obstacles.

If we are to continue on the road towards human emancipation from misery, if we are to transform development and human rights into something more than the utopian dream that they are today for hundreds of millions of people throughout the world, we will need more than good intentions. We will need courage to call things what they are, to correct mistakes and to make urgent decisions.

With optimism and vehemence, I propose to the Assembly that we now take three courses of action that could have powerful effects on the well-being of all humanity.

First, we must denounce increases in military spending, the arms race and the weapons trade as offences to the human condition.

Secondly, we must make a reality, through free trade, of the promise that the globalized economy holds for humanity and in particular for the world's poorest peoples.

Thirdly, we must defend, with all our strength and eloquence, international law and the United Nations, proposing reforms that will enable us successfully to adapt to the tremendous changes that the world is undergoing.

For quite some time I have argued that the struggle for human development is linked to the struggle for disarmament and demilitarization. It is no badge of honour for our species that global military spending exceeded $1 trillion in 2005 — the same level of spending, in real terms, as at the end of the cold war. That represents eight times the annual investment necessary to achieve, in the span of a decade, all the Millennium Development Goals, in every country.

The investment that the most industrialized nations make in their military — they are responsible for 83 per cent of global military spending — is 10 times greater than the amount of resources that they dedicate to official development assistance. The United States, the richest country on the planet, spends, at the very least, 25 times more on the military than it gives in aid. Is this not a clear example of twisted priorities, not to mention profoundly irrational?

Indeed, at the end of the day, rationality is what counts. Since the tragic events of 11 September 2001, global military spending has increased by a little more than $200 billion. There is not a single indicator that suggests that that colossal increase has made the world more secure and human rights more widely enjoyed. On the contrary, we feel increasingly vulnerable and fragile.

Perhaps it is time to think of other ways to deploy those resources. Perhaps it is time to realize that, with a sum much smaller than that one, we could guarantee access to potable water and primary education for every person in the world. Perhaps there would be enough left over, as Gabriel García Márquez once suggested, "to perfume Niagara Falls with sandalwood on an autumn day". Perhaps it is time to understand that this is what would probably make us happier and certainly more secure.

Every weapon is a visible sign of the delay in meeting the needs of the poor. I am not the only one to have said so. The same thing was said, memorably, by a man of arms, President Eisenhower, nearly half a century ago:

> "Every gun that is made, every warship launched, every rocket fired signifies, in the final sense, a theft from those who hunger and are not fed, those who are cold and are not clothed. This world in arms is not spending money alone. It is spending the sweat of its laborers, the genius of its scientists, the hopes of its children."

While it is sad that the richest nations, through military spending, are denying development opportunities to the poorest, it is sadder still that the poor are complicit in destroying their own future. Indeed, it is tragic that the Governments of some of the most underdeveloped countries continue to supply their troops with tanks, warplanes and missiles, supposedly to protect a population afflicted by hunger and ignorance.

My region of the world has not escaped that phenomenon. In 2005, the countries of Latin America spent almost $24 billion on weapons and troops — an amount that has risen 25 per cent in real terms over the last decade and increased substantially in the past year. Latin America has begun a new arms race, even though it has never been more democratic and there have been very few military conflicts between countries in the past century.

In that respect, I believe Costa Ricans have reason to be very proud. Since 1948, thanks to the vision of our former President, José Figueres, a very wise man, Costa Rica abolished its army and declared peace on the world, and we bettered our life.

As I did 20 years ago in my first message to the General Assembly, I can say today with satisfaction that I come from a country without weapons, that our children have never seen a tank, an attack helicopter, a warship or a cannon. As I did 20 years ago, I can say that in my country, fathers and grandfathers explain to the young people the curious architecture of some of our schools, which is due to the fact that, long ago, those schools were military barracks. I can say that in my homeland, none of our citizens, man or woman, knows oppression, and that not a single Costa Rican lives in exile. I can say today that mine is a nation of liberty.

This is a path that neither my country nor I are willing to abandon. Not only that: It is a path that we wish all humanity to follow. Today I would like to propose an idea. I propose that we all give life to the Costa Rican consensus, through which we create mechanisms to forgive debt and provide international financial support to developing nations that invest more and more in education, health and housing, and less and less in soldiers and weapons. It is time that the international financial community reward not only those whose spending is orderly, as it has done to date, but also those whose spending is ethical.

I propose to the Assembly as well that we approve, as soon as possible, an arms trade treaty prohibiting countries from transferring weapons to States, groups or individuals if there is reason to believe that such arms will be used to violate human rights or international law, or if there are clear indications that they will be used to hinder the process of sustainable development.

I hope that the United Nations, at this session of the General Assembly, will approve the formation of a governmental group of experts that will draft the text of a binding treaty on the subject of international arms transfers.

It is time to close the door on the arms trade and on the endless trail of death it leaves in its wake. It is time also to open the door to other forms of commerce — the legitimate and licit trade of goods and services — on which the prosperity of the peoples of the world depends.

I know that in the Assembly there exists a wide range of opinions about the best way to promote global trade so as to provide genuine opportunities for all countries. In a globalized world, the challenge facing developing nations is simple: if we cannot export more goods and services, we will end up exporting more people.

The strongest argument in favour of opening up economies is, quite simply, that it helps to reduce poverty. I sometimes marvel that some continue to insist that globalization is a negative force that is increasing global poverty. On the contrary: according to the World Bank, the number of people living in poverty has fallen by almost 200 million over the past two decades, largely owing to the advances of India and China — two countries that have embraced globalization and have opened up their markets with particular enthusiasm.

Trade liberalization can thus be defended on the basis of the benefits that it brings for the poorest people. If we truly want to meet the ethical challenge of reducing global poverty, wisdom and caution must prevail so that the Doha round can be successful. But I want to stress that the defence of free trade must be honest and consistent. We should seek commercial exchanges that are equally free for all countries. The practice among developed nations of pressing for the elimination of commercial barriers only in the sectors in which they have a clear comparative advantage is ethically indefensible. Furthermore, developing countries need and demand free trade in agriculture. Until we make progress on this issue, we will have to continue paraphrasing George Orwell's famous words, and say that in free trade everyone is equal, but some are more equal than others.

Developing countries need development assistance and solidarity from industrialized countries, but what we need from them above all is consistency. If they extol the virtues of a free market, then let that market actually be free. If in their countries they promote admirable forms of social justice through the welfare state, then let them put that principle into practice on an international scale. If their credo of democracy prevails within their borders, then let them support a more just balance of power within all international organizations.

The third major challenge to which I want to refer today is the strengthening of global governance and the reform of its institutions. This task begins with the defence of multilateralism and the strict adherence of all countries to international law and the fundamental principles of the Charter, the most elemental safeguard against anarchy in the world. Costa Rica, since it lacks an army, is perhaps the country most in need of an effective international system to guarantee its security.

It is essential that the most powerful nations on Earth understand that the survival of international law and of the United Nations is fundamental for their own security; that the mere existence of this forum is one of the great achievements of our species; and that the United Nations represents the triumph of hope over fear, of tolerance over fanaticism and of reason over force.

As I stand here today, I would so much like to hear once more the powerful voice of John F. Kennedy, telling the world, as he did in 1961,

> "To that world assembly of sovereign States, the United Nations, our last best hope in an age where the instruments of war have far outpaced the instruments of peace, we renew our pledge of support — to prevent it from becoming merely a forum for invective, to strengthen its shield of the new and the weak, and to enlarge the area in which its writ may run."

This is the globalization that can transform the lives of all human beings for the better — a globalization in which all countries are, as we are here, equal in rights; a globalization in which each people can make its voice heard and hear the voices of others and in which the exercise of the tolerance that we practise every day in this Hall is the norm, not the exception.

The great British writer Aldous Huxley once wondered whether this world was not another planet's

hell. I do not think it is. It is just a marvellous and complex place, inhabited by a species that is barely in its infancy and that, like an infant, has scarcely begun to understand its immense power to create and to destroy.

For good or for ill, our species writes its history in draft form, never cleanly, always debating with itself — like each one of us — in a perpetual conflict between the good and bad angels of our nature. In this conflict, the victories of the human spirit, as certain as they may seem, are always incomplete, gradual and tentative, and setbacks are always possible. The Earth is not hell. It is a place where there is no perfection — and never will be; just goodness and greatness punctuated by misfortunes, errors and suffering.

The indisputable achievements of the past 20 years tell us that, in spite of our sorrows, human beings continue the march of progress. But now is the time to correct costly mistakes, to right our course and to abandon the destructive behaviour that will make our march of progress infinitely more difficult and tortuous than it should be.

If today we do not confront the rise in military spending and the arms trade; if we do not encourage the poorest countries to invest their scarce resources in life and not in death; if we do not conquer the fear and hypocrisy that impede truly free trade throughout the world; and if we do not strengthen the institutions and the international norms that can protect us against global anarchy, we will be condemned to walk on the edge of a precipice and to engage in futile actions, having to start all over again, like Sisyphus, after every achievement.

I believe that we must supplement optimism with courage and the will to change. I believe that it is time for humanity to build the brightest future that we could possibly dream of.

The Acting President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the President of the Republic of Costa Rica for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Oscar Arias Sánchez, President of the Republic of Costa Rica, was escorted from the General Assembly Hall.

Address by Mrs. Vaira Vike-Freiberga, President of the Republic of Latvia

The Acting President: The Assembly will now hear an address by the President of the Republic of Latvia.

Mrs. Vaira Vike-Freiberga, President of the Republic of Latvia, was escorted into the General Assembly Hall.

The Acting President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations Her Excellency Mrs. Vaira Vike-Freiberga, President of the Republic of Latvia, and to invite her to address the Assembly.

President Vike-Freiberga (*spoke in French*): I would like to begin by congratulating the Republic of Montenegro on its recent accession to the United Nations Organization. We fully understand the challenges that country faces and wish it every success in the establishment of a secure and prosperous State.

I wish to express our highest appreciation to the President of the General Assembly at its sixtieth session, Mr. Jan Eliasson, for his enthusiastic dedication and skilful leadership during the past year. We now sincerely look forward to working with the President of the General Assembly at this session, Sheikha Haya Rashed Al-Khalifa, and I pledge her Latvia's full support. I also congratulate her on being only the third woman ever to preside over the General Assembly.

A year ago, we marked the sixtieth anniversary of the United Nations by setting out a far-reaching reform plan to bring the Organization closer to the needs of the twenty-first century. While the United Nations spectrum of peacekeeping, humanitarian and human rights operations has increased significantly in recent years, the United Nations must continue to step up its activities if it is to meet the urgent needs of millions of people throughout the world.

The current situation presents us with great challenges at the global level that require us to act with urgency and coordination. We will be able to attain the Millennium Development Goals and reduce the crushing poverty that is debilitating the lives of billions of people across this planet only if we pool our resources and redouble our efforts. We need to pursue our campaign against well-known scourges that include

contagious disease and the destruction of the global environment.

(*spoke in English*)

We can take satisfaction in noting that a number of serious and meaningful measures have already been taken to alleviate the plight of the world's poor. Those important steps must be followed up by continued measures to help the world's poorest nations become more self-sufficient. At the same time, the developing countries must do their utmost to implement the practices of good governance, strengthen their institutions and abide by the rule of law.

It is worth emphasizing that the United Nations has been an effective instrument in those countries where the political will has existed to cooperate fully with the United Nations programmes and proposals for alleviating the plight of the poor. At the same time, the efficiency of United Nations operations has also been called into question, and not without reason. More innovative approaches need to be deployed for alleviating poverty and reaching set development objectives. Among those, we should look more to the effective use of information, communication and modern technologies.

I well remember the excitement at the Millennium Summit in 2000, when we adopted the Millennium Declaration. Progress towards reaching the Millennium Development Goals, alas, is still unacceptably slow. The statistics on infant mortality and maternal health, among others, remain particularly distressing. Millions of our fellow human beings have no access to clean drinking water, let alone more sophisticated comforts. We cannot remain indifferent when so much needs to be done.

In many parts of the world, the misery brought on by poverty is compounded by such debilitating and mortal diseases as HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria. While much has already been achieved to control the spread of those afflictions, further partnerships need to be developed with other stakeholders, including those in the private sector.

Only a few days ago, the States Members of the United Nations concluded a High-level Dialogue on International Migration and Development. The dramatic increase of illegal migration in recent years has placed great stress on the international system for protecting refugees and asylum-seekers. The activities of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees on migration issues should be coordinated with regional cooperation efforts in order to become more effective.

We have had the great misfortune to see terrorism continue as a threat to international peace and security. I welcome, therefore, the recent agreement on a Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy and urge the United Nations Member States to intensify their efforts to reach a consensus on a comprehensive anti-terrorism convention.

We have failed to make any substantial progress over the past year in the area of disarmament and the non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. That is a fundamental issue for global peace and security and I encourage all United Nations Member States to demonstrate their willingness to move forward at a faster pace.

The United Nations also needs to provide a prompt and effective response when armed conflicts arise. We must strive to make United Nations peacekeeping a more effective and accepted instrument of collective security. Too often in the past, the United Nations has been unable to prevent genocide and lasting bloodshed — in the Congo, in Rwanda, in the former Yugoslavia and now in the Darfur region of the Sudan. During the past 10 years, the operational activity of the United Nations in peacekeeping has quadrupled, but that may still not be enough. The demand for rapid action cannot be met through United Nations mechanisms alone, but requires a more effective partnership between the United Nations and regional organizations.

The most recent example of the need for a concerted peacekeeping effort is the tragic sequence of events in Israel and Lebanon this past summer. Peacekeeping can facilitate solutions, but not impose them. In Iraq and in Afghanistan, as well as in the continuing conflict between the Israelis and the Palestinians, there will be no durable peace until all parties renounce the use of violence to achieve political aims. A long-lasting settlement requires the political will of all parties in the region to negotiate a viable compromise in good faith, where a secure State of Israel coexists side by side with an independent State of Palestine.

Currently, the United Nations is uniquely positioned to take a leading role in peacebuilding. We

expect the recently established Peacebuilding Commission to help those countries that are emerging from conflict not to be drawn back into it, and hope that the Commission will serve to promote the post-conflict reconstruction and long-term development of regions that have suffered from warfare.

Along with the promotion of peace and security and the alleviation of poverty, the protection of human rights is one of the main missions of the United Nations. The recent creation of the Human Rights Council will hopefully enable the United Nations to respond more promptly and effectively in situations where human rights come under threat. The Council needs to provide real leadership to restore trust in the United Nations as a guardian, defender and promoter of that universal value.

However, the effectiveness of the Human Rights Council depends entirely on the political will and conduct of the Member States. We must work together to ensure that this new institution, in which we have placed such high hopes, truly serves the purpose for which it was created.

During this session, we will face the difficult task of furthering the reform of the United Nations. We have to accept the fact that none of the United Nations Member States will be able to attain absolutely everything they desire from the reform process. At no point should any Members think of negotiations for these necessary reforms as a zero-sum game in which some will be losers and some winners. It is possible to arrive at solutions that constitute a win-win situation for everybody. It takes hard work and a lot of patience, but it can be done.

It is natural for different countries to have different priorities and different threat perceptions. That is a fact of life. It is precisely for that reason that we need the United Nations as a central meeting place where our common interests can be determined and our common plans hammered out in an inclusive and democratic manner. The ongoing reforms of the United Nations are needed for the benefit and advantage of us all, without exception.

The international agreements that are reached within the United Nations bear a unique legitimacy, moral weight and political authority. Yet it is no secret that in an Organization with nearly 200 Members, the decision-making process can be protracted. Nevertheless, despite the painstakingly slow pace of United Nations reform to date, there has been some notable progress during the past year. It is vital for the United Nations to continue striving for more trust and goodwill among all our nations, for we simply cannot afford to do otherwise.

There is general agreement that the time has come for a serious overhaul of the United Nations management system. An effective Secretariat is crucial for the United Nations system's ability to adapt to evolving challenges. So far, only the initial steps have been taken in transforming the United Nations into a more efficient and accountable Organization. The time has come for meaningful changes, and I hope that we will establish tangible results during this sixty-first session.

Mandate review is another essential element of the reform process where our aspirations have been higher than the result achieved. Only a fraction of the numerous mandates have been classified and the question of what to do with them is still pending. We need to move ahead energetically, bearing in mind that this is not a blind cost-cutting exercise but an ongoing process of feedback needed to improve the effectiveness and quality of the Organization's work. Rational use of resources and cost-efficiency will allow us to do more with the resources at the command of the United Nations, without any duplication of effort.

There has been a growing feeling among United Nations Member States of the need for a revitalized and more effective General Assembly. I welcome the regular meetings among the Presidents of the General Assembly, the Security Council and the Economic and Social Council with the aim of achieving maximum complementarity among those principal organs. The Charter of the United Nations provides us with the fundamental guidelines for our work, and we should be guided by it in a spirit of cooperation, not rivalry. It is self-defeating, unproductive and wasteful to invest time and effort in a competition among the main bodies of the United Nations. Only by rising above such internal divisions can the United Nations hope to truly fulfil the leading role that it has to play in order to serve the needs of the world community as a whole.

We must also not neglect the reform of the Security Council, which needs to be more representative of the state of the world in 2006. While this matter should not overshadow the rest of the reform process, neither can it be indefinitely

postponed. Progress on this issue needs to be made, for it would invigorate and give added impetus to the overall reform process. The Security Council has a central role to play in maintaining international peace and security. If it is to function as a truly effective organ, then it must attain both a stronger capacity and a greater willingness to act in the face of international crises and tensions and it must find ways of responding more rapidly at the outbreak of armed conflicts.

At this sixty-first session of the General Assembly, we must make every effort to make progress in adjusting the United Nations to the needs and challenges of our times. This session will be the last under the stewardship of Secretary-General Kofi Annan. During his mandate, Mr. Annan has exhibited outstanding leadership in setting the agenda and establishing a clear vision of the goals of the United Nations. I therefore take this opportunity to thank him for his tireless dedication to the United Nations and for framing and initiating the much-needed reform process. His successor will inherit a vast and complex agenda which can only be tackled with maximum cooperation and flexibility from all Member States.

The United Nations requires a Secretary-General who will be willing to listen to and to respect the views of all, but who will also have the personal courage to push for the necessary, but possibly unpopular, decisions that are needed for the good of the Organization as a whole. A Secretary-General must be endowed with leadership, vision, fairness and objectivity. He or she must be a true citizen of the world who can feel the pulse of humanity. He or she must have the passion and commitment to spare no effort in facing up to the most demanding of challenges.

Today, the United Nations is at a crossroads and faces a choice: to address the challenges of the twenty-first century through the combined efforts of all its Member States, or to gradually lose its influence in the international community.

As many here are aware, I recently announced my decision to submit my candidacy for the position of Secretary-General. I highly appreciate the confidence placed in me by the Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, when he appointed me Special Envoy on United Nations Reform. I am personally committed to addressing the challenges posed by United Nations reform and to promoting human rights, freedom and democracy, including gender equality. While women represent half of the world's population, no woman has ever been at the helm of this Organization. I believe that the time has come for a woman to be considered a serious candidate for the position of Secretary-General.

It so happens that, as a result of historical events in the twentieth century, no Secretary-General has ever come from Eastern Europe. Yet that region has a wealth of experience to share about its ability to effect radical change and achieve progress in a remarkably brief period of time.

Nevertheless, the principle of regional rotation should not be the principal or sole factor in the selection of a candidate. While I deeply respect the candidates who have already been nominated from one part of the world, the selection procedure should not restrict the rights and opportunities of potential candidates from any other part of the world. I hope that the choice made by the Security Council and the General Assembly will be based solely on the candidate's qualifications, personal qualities and vision.

The world needs a strong United Nations, and we as leaders need to build bridges of understanding if we are to make the United Nations as strong as it needs to be. We need to keep alive the main goal of the founders of the United Nations, who were determined "to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war". We owe it to our children, who will inherit this planet, to save them also from the scourges of terrorism, of hunger and of disease.

Because of my own personal experience as a child of war and a refugee, having known fear, cold, loss and hunger in my time, I urge world leaders to save every child that we can from such experiences. Our common goal is to extend worldwide the peace, freedom and prosperity that so many nations have already achieved. It can be done; it must be done. But it is something that we can achieve only by all of us working together.

The Acting President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the President of the Republic of Latvia for the statement she has just made.

Mrs. Vaira Vike-Freiberga, President of the Republic of Latvia, was escorted from the General Assembly Hall.

Address by Mr. Elías Antonio Saca González, President of the Republic of El Salvador

The Acting President: The Assembly will now hear an address by the President of the Republic of El Salvador.

Mr. Elías Antonio Saca González, President of the Republic of El Salvador, was escorted into the General Assembly Hall.

The Acting President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations His Excellency Mr. Elías Antonio Saca González, President of the Republic of El Salvador, and to invite him to address the Assembly.

President Saca González (*spoke in Spanish*): We wish to congratulate Ms. Al-Khalifa for her election as President of the General Assembly at its sixty-first session, with the certainty that her distinguished personal and professional qualities will ensure the optimum performance of the work on the agenda. This also represents recognition of the necessary participation of women in the reforms of the United Nations. I also wish to extend our special recognition to the Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, for his resolute efforts and dedication to international peace and security, stability, human rights and development, in addition to his appreciable contribution to the reform of the Organization.

The international community currently has challenges that require our immediate attention. At the present time, there are more than sixteen armed-conflicts in the world where the United Nations participates in peacekeeping operations. El Salvador is present at some of these operations, concretely demonstrating our belief in an international system of law, and in an international organization capable of resolving such conflicts that seriously threaten our stability.

The situation of instability has an indescribable impact in terms of the loss of human life, the destruction of infrastructure, refugees, displaced persons and the shortage of resources needed for life. This impacts the affected regions, as well as the political, economic and humanitarian condition of the entire international community.

I have come to this rostrum to speak out in favour of peace and security in the Middle East, as well as dialogue and understanding, so that we can find timely and sustainable political and diplomatic solutions that support our belief in the right of the Israeli and Palestinian peoples to live in peace within secure and internationally recognized borders.

We welcome adoption of resolution 1697 (2006) on 31 July and resolution 1701 (2006) on 11 August by the Security Council and call for compliance with those resolutions as they make possible a cessation of hostilities. This should represent the beginning of a new phase in finding a negotiated political solution to the conflict in Lebanon and in the Middle East.

We are fully convinced that one of the keys to progress towards peace in the Middle East is the disarmament of all armed groups operating outside the law and Government control in the region, as well as the exercise by Governments of full sovereignty over their territories. Here, we believe that it is essential for the United Nations, in particular the Security Council, to continue to play a proactive and decisive role in finding a lasting, comprehensive and sustainable solution in the Middle East and to redirect the peace process.

After a careful analysis of the international situation, and of the Middle East in particular, my Government made the decision to move its ambassador from Jerusalem to Tel Aviv. We hope that this will make a contribution to promoting the peace process in the region and serve as an expression of our commitment and respect for compliance with United Nations resolutions.

We do hope that this decision, in addition to making a concrete contribution to peace in the Middle East, will also help to strengthen friendship and understanding between my country and Israel. We also wish to express our feelings of solidarity and friendship to the Palestinian people. They can rely on El Salvador to continue to seek peace, security and well-being for the Palestinian people.

Terrorism is a real and merciless threat against humanity. Accordingly, I wish to reaffirm our vigorous condemnation of all acts of terrorism in all their forms and manifestations, wherever or by whomever they are committed, irrespective of the objective sought.

Today, more than ever, it is essential to strengthen and expand international cooperation to combat this scourge, within the framework of the rule of law, human rights and international humanitarian law. The

United Nations has a historic opportunity to combat international terrorism through the recently adopted Global Strategy against Terrorism. The threat of terrorism is a daily reality, but the opportunity to deal with it is in our hands. Let us do what we need to do to implement this strategy and strengthen international cooperation in combating terrorism.

El Salvador supports and participates actively in attaining these objectives. We continue to promote such action at the national level and hope that our legislative assembly will adopt a law against terrorism in the next few days.

Given the situation of the world as described, we would like to take this opportunity to add our voices to the call of the international community regarding the celebration of the International Day of Peace, set by the General Assembly on 21 September each year. The Assembly issued a firm appeal that during that Day all parties in conflict, wherever they might be, cease their fighting and observe a global ceasefire, leading to reflection about the adverse effects of war and the benefits of peace.

One of the most serious threats to peace, social stability, the security of citizens and economic development is the problem of organized crime. El Salvador, together with other countries in Central America, has been particularly affected by this problem in recent years. The expansion of the criminal activities of bands and gangs that act not only within countries, but also beyond borders. They have become criminal organizations that not only commit individual and group murder, but also engage in extortion and terrorist acts related to transnational crime. They have furthermore become involved in the trafficking of arms and drugs, human trafficking and money-laundering.

El Salvador is aware of the dimensions of the problem and its impact on society. For this reason, we are one of the main countries promoting a comprehensive approach. Not only do we directly combat these groups, but we also use preventive methods, namely, rehabilitation and social reintegration. We are convinced that this task cannot be dealt with individually. What is needed is collective action and international coordination and cooperation.

In this connection, we believe that this Organization should consider the adoption of measures and mechanisms consistent with the instruments and protocols that deal with organized crime, so that we can achieve a broad international consensus aimed at coping more effectively with this evil that, increasingly, is threatening society in general. Moreover, we should develop policies and cooperation to this end. I would mention, in particular, programmes for young people in high-risk situations or who are at odds with the law in our countries.

Speaking of the reform of the United Nations means talking about the suitability and relevance of an international organization could respond adequately to the opportunities and challenges of today's world.

We believe that it is particularly important to break this stalemate in negotiations and settle as soon as possible the question of expanding the membership of the Security Council, both permanent and non-permanent members, so that it can be more representative with respect to the current number of States that are Members of this Organization. For my Government, this is a subject that is extremely important. Therefore, it is essential to make this important body more representative, to give it greater transparency, to make it more democratic and legitimate, particularly in the decision-making process for important decisions.

Also, recognition should be given to some of the reforms adopted, and we welcome the beginning of work of the new Human Rights Council and the Peacebuilding Commission, of which El Salvador is honoured and appreciative of being a part. Here, I wish to reaffirm the commitment of the Government of El Salvador to respect and protect human rights, while we make available to the Peacebuilding Commission the experience gained by El Salvador in its successful peace process. This would initially apply to some countries, such as Burundi and Sierra Leone, that are now being considered with regard to which the Commission will be able to provide advice to the Security Council.

In the life of nations there are always special questions that determine direction and destiny as they move towards their future. The question of the Republic of China in Taiwan is one of those questions. Even though it is a political reality that has evolved in parallel with other States and embodies all of the characteristics needed to be a State, there is still failure to recognize its existence. This denies the right of 23 million people of Taiwan to be represented in international organizations and, in particular, the

United Nations. We firmly believe that the situation of Taiwan should be examined pragmatically in the light of the current political reality. The United Nations is the proper forum to do so — not only because it should recognize the right of the Taiwanese people to be represented, but also because a globalized world should not allow exclusion or marginalization from international cooperation. Such cooperation strengthens efforts to combat challenges and problems that are common to all and could undermine the quality of life and obstruct the development of peoples. Here, we reiterate the need to open up room for the representation and participation of Taiwan in the United Nations, particularly in the specialized agencies, which by their nature are related to humanitarian, economic and social questions.

The President returned to the Chair.

A subject of special interest for El Salvador is the strengthening of international cooperation for development, particularly with a view to complying with the Millennium Development Goals. In this connection, we believe that, in order to implement and follow up on our development plans, we must have the support of the international community so as to create fairer and more open conditions that would enable us to accede to technological resources, the transfer of technology, environmentally friendly technology, the support for the generation of technical capabilities and new financial resources in favourable conditions. El Salvador is firmly committed to attaining the Millennium Development Goals, as envisaged in our Government plan, and accordingly, we have made efforts and directed resources, primarily through national impact programmes, together with international cooperation, with special focus on education and health.

Even though we agree that every country must assume fundamental responsibility for its own development, the developed States should contribute to creating the opportunities needed to enable the relatively less developed countries to reduce the political and economic impact of the social deficit, through the implementation of measures that will enable us to enjoy the benefits of free trade, economic globalization and international cooperation and increase our technical capacity and productivity. This must include the commitment to give 0.7 per cent of gross domestic product as official aid to development. We recognize and express our appreciation to the countries that have already done so.

In this perspective, we have warmly welcomed the adoption of the General Assembly resolution on the follow-up to the results of the 2005 World Summit on development. It is of great importance if we are fully to comply with the Millennium Development Goals that we have set ourselves. We firmly believe that low-income countries and middle-income countries should not be excluded from international cooperation and technical and financial assistance, whether bilateral or multilateral, particularly those countries that have maintained good responsible management of resources obtained through international cooperation and public finance. However, despite the progress achieved in improving the quality of life of our peoples, there are still groups of populations that suffer from extreme poverty and require cooperation and international assistance to supplement the efforts we are making to attain those objectives.

This could not be otherwise, given the fact that middle- and low-income countries continue to face challenges in the development process. Therefore, we would like to make a resounding appeal to the developed countries, the middle-income countries and the multilateral financial agencies to become real partners and strategic allies, so that we can overcome our problems and help us to promote the agenda for development and progress for our peoples.

In this respect, I am pleased to announce that El Salvador is planning to hold a forum next year of low-income countries where we hope to unify criteria and positions on this subject, in addition to considering the strengthening of cooperation and technical, scientific and financial assistance among participating countries. On this occasion, we cordially invite middle- and low-income countries, together with donor countries and development agencies, to participate in this meeting. We hope that their participation and contributions will enrich our analysis and will benefit the middle- and low-income countries, which are frequently excluded from development funds.

My Government attaches great priority to the Agenda for Development, particularly to expand coverage of basic services and generate opportunities for productivity in those areas and communities where, because of their poverty indicators and their growth

potential, we have felt that they deserve strategic attention.

My country has been recognized for having adopted a series of measures to strengthen democratic institutions, economic freedoms and social investment. This has gained us the confidence of the international community, which we believe is indispensable for establishing an environment conducive to mobilizing alternative sources of funding that can make possible social programmes aimed at reducing poverty.

From the beginning of our term in office, we have done much to seek innovative forms of cooperation, such as those offered by various millennium funds. We have applied for Millennium Challenge Account financing for a country programme based on national dialogue and with the participation of our citizens. It will be an integrated, comprehensive strategy directly benefiting more than 850,000 inhabitants of 92 municipalities in northern El Salvador, thus contributing reducing poverty in that region.

No less important and closely complementary, we believe that international cooperation based on solidarity encompasses the swapping of debt for social programmes. We welcome the proposals and decisions of some developed countries, which are supporting such mechanisms, especially in health and education, thereby encouraging countries that have honoured their foreign debt obligations. There is no doubt that these activities strengthen democracy and freedom.

We feel that despite the decline in oil prices, continued high prices are not only detrimental to the efforts of developing countries to improve and strengthen our economies, because they make exports and imports more expensive, reduce income and create inflation. They also have a negative impact on chain of production, and on basic necessities and services, opening the way to the possibility of a worldwide recession, which clearly would have political and social repercussions. We feel that oil should not be used as a tool to achieve goals of any kind, but rather as a means to strengthen the global economy in general. It is important to define rules for creating a more stable oil market and at the same time to enhance our efforts to find alternative sources of energy that are accessible and environmentally friendly.

For El Salvador, migration is one of the priorities on our domestic and international agenda. We have decided to create, for the first time in the history of El Salvador, the post of Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs for Salvadorans Living Abroad, a high-level Government position within the Foreign Ministry, whose main function is to serve emigrants through a comprehensive, multidimensional policy. The vice-ministry is operating successfully. Salvadorans living abroad are on the presidential agenda. Last week, the Assembly held a High-level Dialogue on International Migration and Development. El Salvador participated proactively and chaired one of the round tables. I am thankful for the confidence placed in us.

Allow me to reaffirm what was expressed by the Foreign Minister of El Salvador at the High-level Dialogue. We stress the importance of this issue and the need to continue discussions from a broad-based and positive perspective, which gives us a comprehensive view and a higher level of understanding of the issue of migration as an international social fact. Migration gives rise to a dynamic and complex process involving various aspects including flows of individuals, capital, goods and services. It involves rights and obligations, organization, assistance, cooperation, legal and legislative processes, analysis, studies and research on this issue, and subsequent oversight by the United Nations system, as a complement to domestic, subregional and continental efforts.

I welcome the outcome of the Dialogue and express the hope that the United Nations will give the issue of migration human, just and balanced consideration.

On 16 January 2007, we will celebrate the fifteenth anniversary of the signing of the peace accords for El Salvador. Fifteen years ago, Salvadorans were fully convinced that we were worthy of a better future and deserved a rebuilt, democratic country, a country of reconciliation and freedom for us and for our children. We can now be proud of our endeavours to genuinely fulfil the commitments made at Chapultepec, whose spirit should prevail as we continue to strengthen democratic institutions in my country.

I would like to pay public tribute to the entire people of El Salvador for their dedication to the cause of peace and national reconciliation. I would also like to acknowledge the men and women who signed the peace accords, whose historic action was the basis for our present and future as a nation. Likewise, I would

like to pay a special tribute to the United Nations for its work and for its effective mediation, which led to the completion in 2003 of its work to monitor the peace accords, and to the countries of the Group of Friends of El Salvador for their important support for the successful completion of the peace process.

Today, the United Nations — an Organization created to promote and realize universal principles and ideals that are still valid in our contemporary world, especially the ideal of promoting progress for the millions of persons throughout the world who struggle daily to secure their basic rights, dignity and importance as human beings — has a choice: either to ossify and become anachronic, or to modernize and become an Organization that can deal more efficiently and effectively with the challenges of the twenty-first century in a complex, globalized and interdependent world.

It is clear that we all wish for a modern and viable Organization to meet the challenges together, but Member States will decide whether the Organization changes to fulfil its mandate, especially to maintain international peace and security and promote respect for human rights and economic and social development.

Thus, it will depend on us whether the present and the future of the today's world will be based on diplomacy or will be condemned to use force to resolve differences in international relations. This is the serious dilemma that we must resolve. The task is complex because of its size and ramifications, due in turn to its diversity in the face of the phenomena of power and the exercise of power. We hold the hope that reason and conscience will prevail over force and domination — for the benefit of all humanity.

The President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the President of El Salvador for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Elías Antonio Saca González, President of the Republic of El Salvador, was escorted from the General Assembly Hall.

Address by Mr. Runaldo Ronald Venetiaan, President of the Republic of Suriname

The President: The Assembly will now hear an address by the President of the Republic of Suriname.

Mr. Runaldo Ronald Venetiaan, President of the Republic of Suriname, was escorted into the General Assembly Hall.

The President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations His Excellency Mr. Runaldo Ronald Venetiaan, President of the Republic of Suriname, and to invite him to address the Assembly.

President Venetiaan: On behalf of the Government and the people of the Republic of Suriname, I should like to take this opportunity to extend to you, Madam, and to the Government and the people of the Kingdom of Bahrain, my sincere congratulations on your election to preside over the General Assembly at its sixty-first session.

We express our gratitude to His Excellency Mr. Jan Eliasson, President of the General Assembly at its sixtieth session, for his contribution to the work of the Organization. I should also like to pledge our support to the Secretary-General, His Excellency Mr. Kofi Annan, and to pay tribute to him for his leadership, his valuable contribution to the resolution of global challenges and his constructive role in restructuring the United Nations.

In today's world, guaranteeing necessary infrastructure and ensuring the availability of health services and education for all are still major challenges. The world order continues to deny the vast majority of the members of the international community the opportunity to escape poverty and to utilize their abilities and skills to achieve progress and prosperity. There is a need for enhanced cooperation in areas of relevance to humanity if we are to create an international community that can offer all of its members a fair chance of a decent life.

The call for an enabling international environment for sustainable development and poverty eradication is still a strong one. The international community needs to support the call of the vast majority of its members for fair terms of trade, increased market access for products from the developing countries and a more effective and supportive international financial architecture.

Given the international state of affairs, Suriname supports the implementation of the international global partnership for development. The partnership for development can obtain guidance for its decisions from

the many commitments adopted at the major United Nations conferences and summits in the economic, social and related fields, in particular those reflected in the Millennium Development Goals and the Monterey Consensus. This partnership should aim to energize the political will of all States to implement those commitments and to create genuine opportunities for all States in the field of trade, as well as for investments that promote sustainable development and poverty eradication.

My delegation continues to plead for a rule-based, predictable, non-discriminatory trading and financial system, and for an international system that promotes decent and productive work and extends the benefits of new technology to all parts of the globe.

The focus of the partnership for development must be the establishment of a supportive international environment to achieve, in particular Millennium Development Goal 8 and its targets.

Building a global partnership for development will require the involvement and cooperation of all stakeholders — Governments, the private sector and civil society alike. The partnership should enhance the involvement of the private sector, taking into account the redefinition of the role of the private sector in society based on a common understanding of the influence of business in spurring development and improving the human condition.

The contribution of the private sector is pivotal to a national policy geared towards enhancing human capital and infrastructure and gaining access to world markets. We note with satisfaction the leadership of the United Nations in this area, and believe that the United Nations Global Compact should collaborate with the partnership for development. Civil society should contribute actively to the partnership for development at all levels, in particular at the national level. Its activities should be in harmony with and complementary to national development efforts.

The challenges we face in the area of international peace and security are equally serious. The increased efforts of the United Nations to save humanity from the scourge of warfare are not always successful. Too often the international community is confronted with situations that seriously jeopardize the safety of individuals and populations.

The Government of Suriname believes that there is a need for us to realize that the United Nations is in fact still our partnership for international peace and security. This partnership should be based on the firm determination of all States to cooperate in seeking fair and lasting solutions to persistent problems that adversely affect international peace and security. Tolerance, mutual respect and mutual interest, leading to the peaceful coexistence of States, good-neighbourliness and unity in diversity, should be the basic principles that guide the recommendations of the partnership for international peace and security.

Recently, the General Assembly adopted the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy (resolution 60/288). This is certainly a step forward towards an effective international response to terrorism, in conformity with international law, international human rights law and international humanitarian law. My delegation notes with satisfaction that the Strategy includes the promotion of dialogue, tolerance and understanding among civilizations. Of equal importance is the recognition that capacity-building in all States is a core element of the global counter-terrorism effort. In this regard, we anticipate a genuine partnership being established to implement the Strategy.

The illegal drugs trade and organized crime also affect international security. Increased cooperation at all levels is needed if the international community is to be able to respond adequately to those threats. In this connection, the Government of Suriname will host an anti-narcotics conference in October 2006. The main purpose of the conference is to enhance coordination and collaboration among participating countries, aimed at combating trafficking in narcotic drugs, dismantling drug-related criminal organizations and combating the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons, given the increased levels of crime that it generates.

A restructured United Nations must ensure that the Organization remains the source of redress for the international community and the home of international justice and equitable decision-making. Given the less-than-satisfactory international development and security situation, we, the States Members of the United Nations, should be more than willing to act in conformity with the Charter, to employ the international machinery for promoting the economic and social advancement of all peoples, to unite our strengths to maintain international peace and security,

and to practise increased tolerance and live together in peace as good neighbours. Suriname believes that the present session of the General Assembly can contribute significantly to those endeavours.

The President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the President of the Republic of Suriname for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Runaldo Ronald Venetiaan, President of the Republic of Suriname, was escorted from the General Assembly Hall.

Address by Mr. Evo Morales Ayma, President of the Constitutional Republic of Bolivia

The President: The Assembly will now hear an address by the President of the Constitutional Republic of Bolivia.

Mr. Evo Morales Ayma, President of the Constitutional Republic of Bolivia, was escorted into the General Assembly Hall.

The President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations His Excellency Mr. Evo Morales Ayma, President of the Constitutional Republic of Bolivia, and to invite him to address the Assembly.

President Morales Ayma (*spoke in Spanish*): It is a source of great satisfaction to be here to represent my people, my homeland, Bolivia, and especially the indigenous movement. After more than 500 years of contempt and hatred for peoples once considered savages and animals — peoples who in some regions were condemned to extermination — we have come to right a historical wrong, to right the wrongs of 500 years, thanks to today's awareness and the uprising and struggle for the rights of peoples.

During the period of the Republic, when we were also discriminated against and marginalized, the struggle of peoples for life and humanity was never taken into account. Over the past 20 years, through the application of an economic model, neo-liberalism, the plundering of our natural resources and the privatization of basic services continued. We are convinced that privatizing basic services is the best way to violate human rights.

Those minor considerations require us — and require me personally — to speak the truth here about the lives of families. I come to express this feeling for the humanity of peoples, of my people; I come to express the suffering caused by marginalization and exclusion; and, above all, I come to express the anti-colonial thoughts of peoples who are fighting for equality and justice.

In my country, we are beginning to seek profound democratic and peaceful change. We are in the process of identifying ways to recreate Bolivia in order to unite Bolivians; to recreate Bolivia in order to bring all the sectors and regions of my country closer together; to recreate Bolivia, but not to take revenge against anyone, although we have been subjected to discrimination; and, in particular, to recreate Bolivia to put an end to this contempt, this hatred for peoples. I say this because my mother told me that when she would go to the city, she did not have the right to walk in the main squares of my country's cities; as recently as 30 or 40 years ago, she did not have the right to walk on the pavement.

Fortunately, however, we have decided to move beyond that social, labour and communal struggle to a new electoral struggle so that we ourselves can resolve social, economic and structural problems. We are casting our lot with the reform-minded Constituent Assembly. I would like the United Nations to participate in this process of peaceful and democratic change, which is the best thing that we could do for our abandoned and marginalized families.

Surely, many other countries have the same problems as my country, a nation with so much wealth but also so much poverty. Historically, our natural resources were stolen, plundered, sold off and delivered to transnational corporations by neo-liberal Governments. The time has come for those in the vanguard of the struggle of peoples for power and territory to recover those natural resources for the Bolivian State so that they can be under the people's control.

When we talk about recovering our natural resources, they tell us, in this dirty campaign of accusations, that the Government of Evo Morales is not going to respect private property. I want to tell them that my Government will respect private property. It is true that we need investment; we need partners — not bosses, not owners of our natural resources. We understand perfectly well that an underdeveloped country needs investment.

I would like to clear up for everyone a number of concerns and false accusations. If the Bolivian State exercises its property rights over natural resources such as natural gas, hydrocarbons and petroleum, we will not expel anyone or confiscate anything. Investors will be respected; indeed, they will be guaranteed a return on their investment and the right to make a profit. But they will not make fat profits as they did before, and then fail to resolve my country's social problems.

I have not come to tell anyone how to govern. I have not come to threaten a country or to start to set conditions for a country. I wish only to ask that, as international organizations, as States with a spirit of solidarity, as nations with principles of reciprocity and brotherhood, all players participate in the process of moving towards democracy. We are very concerned that there be an awareness, in international forums such as the United Nations, of the need to work to bring about peaceful change.

All are aware, in North America in particular as well as in Europe, that many Bolivians are leaving their country to find work. It used to be Europeans who invaded Latin America, and especially Bolivia. Now, however, it seems that the situation has changed. It is the Latin Americans and the Bolivians who are invading Europe, as they did previously the United States. Why? Because, at the present time, there are no jobs. What is needed is fair trade, trade by peoples for peoples, trade that resolves employment problems.

Of course, trade by corporations is important, but trade by small producers is even more important. For the benefit of these cooperatives, these associations and these collectives, their products — not my brothers and sisters — are the ones that should go to Europe. That is what we wish to see. Greater awareness on the part of the international community is required if we wish to resolve the problem of migration.

Our brothers and sisters will not go take over thousands of hectares, as others did when they came to Latin America. They came to take our wealth and our resources. It is important to note that, even in my country, this so-called free trade — affecting major agribusiness concerns. As a consequence of the free trade agreement that Colombia signed with the United States, soy farmers, Bolivians, and even Colombian agribusiness concerns have lost market share. I am convinced that it is important to import what we do not produce and export what we do produce. That would resolve economic problems and the problem of unemployment.

I should like to take this opportunity to speak of another historical injustice: the criminalization of the coca leaf. This coca leaf is green, not white, like cocaine. The coca leaf is symbolic of Andean culture, of the Andean environment and of the hopes of peoples. It is not acceptable that the coca leaf be legal for Coca-Cola and illegal for medicinal consumption not only in our country but throughout the world.

The United Nations should be aware that scientific studies have been carried out in American and European universities that have shown that the coca leaf has no negative effects on human health. I am very sorry that because some have a drug habit, the coca leaf has become illegal. We are aware of that. That is why, as coca leaf producers, we have stated that there will not be unfettered coca leaf production, but neither will there be zero production. Conditionality-based policies implemented in the past focused on zero coca-leaf production. But zero coca-leaf production is equivalent to zero Quechuas, zero Aymarás, zero Mojeños, zero Chiquitanos. All of that ended with another Government. We are an underdeveloped country with economic problems resulting from the pillage of our natural resources. We are here today to begin to regain our dignity and the dignity of our country.

In that context, I wish to say that the best contribution to combating drug trafficking has been through an agreed, voluntary reduction, with no deaths or injuries. I was pleased to hear that the United Nations report recognizes the honest and responsible effort that has been made to combat drug trafficking. Drug seizures have increased 300 per cent. However, yesterday I heard the United States Government state that it would not accept coca cultivation and that it was imposing conditions on us so that we would change our system.

I want to say, with all due respect for the United States Government, that we are not going to change anything. We do not need blackmail or threats. The so-called certifications or de-certifications used in the combat against drug trafficking are simply an instrument for the recolonization or colonization of Andean countries. We will not accept or allow this.

We want, and need, an alliance to combat drug trafficking, but it must be genuine and effective. The

war on drugs cannot be an instrument or a pretext to subjugate the Andean countries, just as the idea of preventive war was invented to intervene in certain countries of the Middle East. We must wage an effective battle against drug trafficking. I call on the United Nations and invite the Government of the United States to reach an agreement and to forge an effective alliance to combat drug trafficking. The war on drugs should not be used as an excuse or a pretext to dominate or humiliate us, or to try to establish military bases in our country under the pretext of combating the drug trade.

I should like also to take this opportunity, in the context of this process of change, to say that we want justice. That is important to our peoples. I believe that, through the Constituent Assembly, justice will be decolonized and nationalized. That will be true justice. As long as some violate others' human rights, as long as peoples are threatened by military intervention, there will never be justice.

We are committed, as Presidents and heads of State, to safeguarding the dignity of humanity by putting an end to the impunity promoted by my country's previous Governments and to the massacres of people demanding their economic rights and claiming their natural resources. It is not acceptable that the perpetrators of genocide and the most corrupt criminals can escape and move to the United States. With all due respect, I ask the United States, as a developed country, to expel those corrupt, genocidal criminals who are living there. If they have nothing to hide, why are they not defending themselves before the Bolivian judiciary?

I am obligated, as President, to ensure that they are tried by the Bolivian justice system. I do not believe that any country or any head of State can protect criminals or those who are guilty of genocide. I hope that, with the support of the American people, through international organizations, those responsible for so much economic damage and so many violations of human rights will be brought to justice, or there will never be respect for human rights.

I have been entrusted by the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues to say the following. Previously, debates on the rights of indigenous peoples were held in the United Nations Sub-commission dealing with that issue, in Geneva, and in the framework of the Organization of American States (OAS). But I have been informed that the debate has now moved to this highest of bodies, the United Nations itself.

I call on the Assembly, on behalf of the indigenous peoples of the world, and particularly those of Abiallal — now known as America — urgently to adopt the declaration on the rights of the indigenous peoples of the world: the right to self-determination, the right to live in communities, and the right to live a life based on solidarity and reciprocity, and, above all, on brotherhood.

There are regions and communities where there is no private property, only community property. We indigenous peoples want, quite simply, to live well, not better. Living better means exploiting, pillaging, robbing, whereas living well is living peacefully in brotherhood. That is why it is extremely important for the United Nations, after the Decade of the Indigenous Peoples, to adopt as a matter of urgency the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, including the right to natural resources and the right to care for the environment.

We indigenous peoples, particularly the poor, are of the culture of life, not the culture of war. This millennium must really be about defending life and saving humanity. If we want to save humanity, we must save the planet Earth. We indigenous peoples live in harmony with Mother Earth, not only in reciprocity and solidarity with human beings. We are very sorry that hegemonistic policies and rivalries are destroying the planet Earth. I feel that it is important for all countries, societies and international organizations to begin to debate this subject truly, in order to save the planet Earth, to save humanity.

This new millennium in which we are living must be a millennium of life, not war, a millennium of the people, not of empire, a millennium of justice and equality; and all economic policies must be directed towards ending or at least reducing the so-called asymmetries or differences between countries and social inequalities. There is no question now of implementing policies that involve the economic humiliation or pillaging of others, whether with rules or with troops.

With all due respect, I wish to say that it is important for the troops to be withdrawn from Iraq, if we want to respect human rights. It is important to abandon economic policies that allow capital to be concentrated in just a few hands. I feel that these

actions have to be of historic importance in order to change the world and to change economic models and interventionist policies. In particular, we want these to be times which enable us to defend and save humanity.

The President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the President of the Constitutional Republic of Bolivia for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Evo Morales Ayma, President of the Constitutional Republic of Bolivia, was escorted from the General Assembly Hall.

Address by Mr. Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, President of the Islamic Republic of Iran

The President: The Assembly will now hear an address by the President of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Mr. Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, President of the Islamic Republic of Iran, was escorted into the General Assembly Hall.

The President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations His Excellency Mr. Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, President of the Islamic Republic of Iran, and to invite him to address the Assembly.

President Ahmadinejad (*spoke in Farsi; English text provided by the delegation*): I praise the merciful, all-knowing and almighty God for blessing me with another opportunity to address this Assembly on behalf of the great nation of Iran and to bring a number of issues to the attention of the international community. I also praise the Almighty for the increasing vigilance of peoples across the globe, their courageous presence in different international settings, and the brave expression of their views and aspirations regarding global issues.

Today, humanity passionately craves commitment to the truth, devotion to God, the quest for justice and respect for the dignity of human beings. Rejection of domination and aggression, defence of the oppressed, and longing for peace constitute the legitimate demand of the peoples of the world, particularly the new generations and the spirited youth who aspire to a world free from decadence, aggression and injustice, replete with love and compassion. The youth have a right to seek justice and the truth. They have a right to build their own future on the foundations of love, compassion and tranquillity. I praise the Almighty for this immense blessing.

What afflicts humanity today is certainly not compatible with human dignity. The Almighty has not created human beings so that they could transgress against others and oppress them. By causing war and conflict, some are quickly expanding their domination, accumulating greater wealth and usurping all the resources, while others endure poverty, suffering and misery as a result.

Some seek to rule the world relying on weapons and threats, while others live in perpetual insecurity and danger. Some occupy the homeland of others, thousands of kilometres away from their borders, interfere in their affairs and control their oil and other resources and strategic routes, while others are bombarded daily in their own homes, their children murdered in the streets and alleys of their own country, and their homes reduced to rubble.

Such behaviour is not worthy of human beings and runs counter to the truth, to justice and to human dignity. The fundamental question is this: under such conditions, where should the oppressed seek justice? Who, or what organization, defends the rights of the oppressed and suppresses acts of aggression and oppression? Where is the seat of global justice?

A brief glance at a few examples of the most pressing global issues further illustrates the problem. The first is the unbridled expansion of nuclear, chemical and biological weapons. Some Powers have proudly announced the production of second- and third-generation nuclear weapons. What do they need those weapons for? Is the development and stockpiling of such deadly weapons designed to promote peace and democracy? Or, are the weapons actually instruments of coercion and threat directed against other peoples and Governments?

How long should the people of the world have to live with the nightmare of nuclear, biological and chemical weapons? What binds the Powers that produce and possess those weapons? How can they be held accountable by the international community? Furthermore, are the inhabitants of those countries content with wasting their wealth and resources on the production of such destructive arsenals? Is it not possible to rely on justice, ethics and wisdom instead of on such instruments of death? Are not wisdom and justice more compatible with peace and tranquility

than nuclear, chemical and biological weapons? If wisdom, ethics and justice prevail, then oppression and aggression will be uprooted, threats will wither away and no reason will remain for conflict.

This is a solid proposition, because most global conflicts result from injustice and from the fact that the powerful are not content with their own rights, but want to deny the rights of others.

People across the globe embrace justice and are willing to make sacrifices for its sake. Would it not be easier for the global Powers to ensure their longevity and win hearts and minds through the championing and real promotion of justice, compassion and peace, rather than by continuing the proliferation of nuclear and chemical weapons and threatening their use?

We have experienced the threat and the use of nuclear weapons. Has it achieved anything for the perpetrators other than the exacerbation of tension, hatred and animosity among nations?

The second issue is the occupation of countries and the exacerbation of hostilities. The occupation of Iraq has continued for the past three years. Not a day goes by without hundreds of people being killed in cold blood. The occupiers are incapable of establishing security in Iraq. Despite the establishment of a lawful Government and the National Assembly of Iraq, covert and overt efforts are being made to heighten insecurity, magnify and aggravate differences within Iraqi society and instigate civil strife.

There is no sign that the occupiers have the necessary political will to eliminate the sources of instability. Numerous terrorists were apprehended by the Government of Iraq, only to be let loose under various pretexts by the occupiers. It seems that the intensification of hostilities and terrorism serves as a pretext for the continued presence of foreign forces in Iraq.

Where can the people of Iraq seek refuge, and from whom should the Government of Iraq seek justice? Who can ensure Iraq's security? Insecurity in Iraq affects the entire region. Can the Security Council play a role in restoring peace and security in Iraq when the occupiers are themselves permanent members of the Council? Is the Security Council capable of making a fair decision in this regard?

Let us consider the situation in Palestine. The roots of the Palestinian problem go back to the Second World War. Under the pretext of protecting some of the survivors of that war, the land of Palestine was occupied through war and aggression, resulting in the displacement of millions of its inhabitants. It was placed under the control of some of the survivors of the war, who brought even larger population groups from elsewhere in the world who had not even been affected by the Second World War. A Government was established in the territory of others with a population collected from throughout the world at the cost of driving millions of the rightful inhabitants of the land into diaspora and homelessness.

That is a great tragedy with hardly any precedent in history. Refugees continue to live in temporary refugee camps, and many have died while still hoping one day to return to their land. Can any logic, law or legal reasoning justify this tragedy? Would any Member of the United Nations accept such a tragedy if it occurred in its own homeland?

The pretexts for the creation of the regime occupying Al-Quds al-Sharif are so weak that its supporters want to silence any voice that tries merely to speak about them, as they are concerned that shedding light on the facts would undermine the raison d'être of the regime — as, indeed, it has done. The tragedy did not end with the establishment of a regime on the territory of others. Regrettably, from its inception, that regime has been a constant source of threat and insecurity in the Middle East region — waging war, spilling blood and impeding the progress of countries in the region. It has also been used by some Powers as an instrument of division, coercion and pressure on the people of the region.

Reference to those historical realities may cause some disquiet among supporters of that regime. But these are simple facts, not myths. History has unfolded before our eyes. Worse still is the unwarranted blanket support provided to the regime. We need only watch what is happening in the Palestinian land. People are being bombarded in their own homes and their children murdered in their own streets and alleys. But no authority, not even the Security Council, can afford them any support or protection. Why?

Meanwhile, a Government has been formed democratically and through the free choice of the electorate in a part of the Palestinian territory. But instead of receiving the support of the so-called champions of democracy, its ministers and members of

parliament have been illegally abducted and incarcerated in full view of the international community.

What council or international organization is standing up to protect this brutally besieged Government? Why cannot the Security Council take any steps?

I should like now to address the issue of Lebanon. For 33 long days, the Lebanese lived under a barrage of fire and bombs, and close to 1.5 million of them were displaced. Meanwhile, some members of the Security Council practically chose a path that provided ample opportunity for the aggressor to achieve its objectives militarily. We saw the Security Council practically incapacitated by certain Powers so that it could not even call for a ceasefire. The Security Council sat idly by for many days, witnessing cruel scenes of atrocities against the Lebanese, while tragedies such as the one that occurred at Qana were persistently repeated. Why?

In all of these cases, the answer is self-evident. When the Power behind the hostilities is itself a permanent member of the Security Council, how can the Council fulfil its responsibilities?

The third issue is lack of respect for the rights of members of the international community.

I now wish to speak about some of the grievances of the Iranian people and about the injustices against them.

The Islamic Republic of Iran is a member of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and is committed to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT). All our nuclear activities are transparent and peaceful and are under the watchful eyes of IAEA inspectors. Why then are there objections to our legally recognized rights? Which Governments object to those rights? Governments that themselves benefit from nuclear energy and the fuel cycle. Some of them have abused nuclear technology for non-peaceful ends, including the production of nuclear bombs, and some even have a bleak record of using them against humanity.

Which organization or council should address those injustices? Is the Security Council in a position to address them? Can it stop violations of the inalienable rights of countries? Can it prevent certain Powers from impeding the scientific progress of other countries? The abuse of the Security Council, as an instrument of threat and coercion, is indeed a source of grave concern. Some permanent members of the Security Council, even when they are themselves parties to international disputes, conveniently threaten others with the Security Council and, even before any decision by the Council, proclaim the Council's condemnation of their opponents.

The question is: what can justify such exploitation of the Security Council, and do not such acts erode its credibility and effectiveness? Can such behaviour strengthen the ability of the Council to maintain security?

A review of recent historical realities would lead to the regrettable conclusion that justice has become a victim of force and aggression. Many global arrangements have become unjust, discriminatory and irresponsible as a result of undue pressure from some of the powerful nations. Threats to use nuclear weapons and other instruments of war, by some powers have taken the place of respect for the rights of nations and the maintenance and promotion of peace and tranquillity.

For some Powers, claims of promoting human rights and democracy can last only as long as the claims can be used as instruments of pressure and intimidation against other nations. But when it comes to the interests of the claimants, concepts such as democracy, the right of self-determination of nations, respect for the rights and intelligence of peoples, and international law and justice have no place or value. That is blatantly manifested in the way in which the elected Government of the Palestinian people is treated, as well as in the support extended to the Zionist regime. It does not matter if people are murdered in Palestine, turned into refugees, captured, imprisoned or besieged; that, apparently, does not violate human rights.

Nations are not equal in exercising their rights as recognized by international law. Enjoying those rights is dependent on the whim of certain major Powers. Apparently, the Security Council can only be used to ensure the security and the rights of some big Powers. But when the oppressed are being bombarded and decimated, the Security Council must remain aloof and not even call for a ceasefire. Is this not a tragedy of historic proportions for the Security Council, which is charged with maintaining the security of countries?

The prevailing order of contemporary global interactions is such that certain Powers equate themselves with the international community and consider that their decisions supersede those of over 180 other countries. They consider themselves to be the masters and rulers of the entire world and give other nations a mere second-class ranking in the world order.

The question needs to be asked: if the Governments of the United States or the United Kingdom, countries which are permanent members of the Security Council, commit aggression, occupation and violation of international law, which of the United Nations organs can call them to account? Can a Council in which they are privileged members address their violations? Has that ever happened? In fact, we have repeatedly seen the reverse. If they have a difference with a nation or State, they bring the matter to the Security Council as claimants, then simultaneously arrogate to themselves the roles of prosecutor, judge and executioner. Is that a just order? Can there be a more vivid case of discrimination and more clear evidence of injustice?

Regrettably, the persistence of some hegemonic Powers in imposing their exclusionist policies on the international decision-making mechanisms, including the Security Council, has resulted in a growing mistrust on the part of world public opinion that is undermining the credibility and effectiveness of the most universal system of collective security. How long can such a situation last in the world? It is evident that the behaviour of some Powers constitutes the greatest challenge before the Security Council, the entire Organization and its affiliated agencies.

The present structure and working methods of the Security Council, which are legacies of the Second World War, are not responsive to the expectations of the current generation and the contemporary needs of humanity. Today, it is undeniable that the Security Council, most critically and urgently, requires legitimacy and effectiveness. It must be acknowledged that as long as the Council is unable to act on behalf of the entire international community in a transparent, just and democratic manner, it will be neither legitimate nor effective. Furthermore, the direct relationship between abuse of the veto power and erosion of the legitimacy and effectiveness of the Council has now been clearly and undeniably established. We cannot and should not expect the eradication, or even the containment, of injustice, imposition and oppression without reforming the structure and working methods of the Council.

Is it appropriate to expect this generation to submit to decisions and arrangements established over half a century ago? Does not this generation or future generations have the right to make their own decisions about the world in which they want to live?

Today, genuine reform in the structure and working methods of the Security Council is more necessary than ever. Justice and democracy dictate that the role of the General Assembly, as the highest organ of the United Nations, must be respected. The General Assembly can then, through appropriate mechanisms, take on the task of reforming the Organization and, in particular, rescue the Security Council from its current state. In the interim, the Non-Aligned Movement, the Organization of the Islamic Conference and the African continent should each have permanent-member status in the Security Council, with veto privilege. The resulting balance would hopefully prevent further trampling of the rights of nations.

It is essential that spirituality and ethics find their rightful place in international relations. Without ethics and spirituality, attained in the light of the teachings of the divine prophets, justice, freedom and human rights cannot be guaranteed. The resolution of contemporary human crises lies in observing ethics and spirituality and in the governance of righteous people of high competence and piety. Should respect for the rights of human beings become the predominant objective, then injustice, ill temper, aggression and war will fade away.

Human beings are all God's creatures and are all endowed with dignity and respect. No one has superiority over others. No individual or State can arrogate to themselves special privileges, nor can they disregard the rights of others or position themselves, through influence and pressure, as the "international community".

Citizens of Asia, Africa, Europe and America are all equal. Over six billion inhabitants of the Earth are all equal and worthy of respect. Justice and the protection of human dignity are the two pillars in maintaining sustainable peace, security and tranquillity in the world.

It is for this reason that we state that sustainable peace and tranquility in the world can only be attained through justice, spirituality, ethics, compassion and respect for human dignity. All nations and States are entitled to peace, progress and security. We are all members of the international community, and we are all entitled to insist on the creation of a climate of compassion, love and justice.

All Members of the United Nations are affected by both the bitter and sweet events and developments in today's world. We can adopt firm and logical decisions, thereby improving the prospects for a better life for current and future generations. Together, we can eradicate the roots of bitter maladies and afflictions, and instead, through the promotion of universal and lasting values, such as ethics, spirituality and justice, allow our nations to taste the sweetness of a better future.

Peoples, driven by their divine nature, intrinsically seek good, virtue, perfection and beauty. Relying on our peoples, we can take giant steps towards reform and pave the road to human perfection. Whether we like it or not, justice, peace and virtue will sooner or later prevail in the world with the will of Almighty God. It is imperative, and also desirable, that we, too, contribute to the promotion of justice and virtue.

The Almighty and Merciful God, who is the Creator of the Universe, is also its Lord and Ruler. Justice is His command. He commands His creatures to support one another in good, virtue and piety, and not in decadence or corruption. He commands His creatures to enjoin one another to righteousness and virtue and not to sin or transgression. All divine prophets, from the Prophet Adam (peace be upon him) to the Prophet Moses (peace be upon him), to the Prophet Jesus Christ (peace be upon him), to the Prophet Mohammad (peace be upon him), have all called humanity to monotheism, justice, brotherhood, love and compassion. Is it not possible to build a better world based on monotheism, justice, love and respect for the rights of human beings, and thereby transform animosities into friendship?

I emphatically declare that today's world, more than ever before, longs for just and righteous people with love for all humanity; and above all, it longs for the perfect righteous human being and the real saviour who has been promised to all peoples and who will establish justice, peace and brotherhood on the planet.

O, Almighty God, all men and women are Your creatures, and You have ordained their guidance and salvation. Bestow upon humanity that thirsts for justice the perfect human being promised to all by You, and make us among his followers and among those who strive for his return and his cause.

The President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the President of the Islamic Republic of Iran for the statement he has just made.

President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, President of the Islamic Republic of Iran, was escorted from the General Assembly Hall.

Address by Mr. Nicanor Duarte Frutos, President of the Republic of Paraguay

The President: The Assembly will now hear an address by the President of the Republic of Paraguay.

Mr. Nicanor Duarte Frutos, President of the Republic of Paraguay, was escorted into the General Assembly Hall.

The President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations His Excellency Mr. Nicanor Duarte Frutos, President of the Republic of Paraguay, and to invite him to address the Assembly.

President Duarte Frutos (*spoke in Spanish*): Madam President, may I tell you how happy Paraguay is to see you presiding over the sixty-first session of the General Assembly. Your personal and professional qualities ensure the success of this session.

I wish to reiterate what I said at the earlier summit meeting. For Paraguay, peace and security, development with social justice, democracy and human rights are the fundamental pillars on which the world must be based, because they are interconnected principles that mutually strengthen each other. We cannot consider ourselves to be in an airtight compartment, because if pride of place is given to one over another, this Assembly will not be a pluralistic, representative body. Rather, the single-voiced will of Powers will continue to be imposed on others.

My delegation thanks the Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, for his detailed annual report on the work of the Organization (A/61/1). Ideally, the

Secretary-General would not travel only to those places where barbaric warfare is destroying cities and killing innocent, defenceless people. Perhaps something would change if he were also to go to see the vast universe of poverty and social exclusion resulting from worldwide, profoundly unjust disorder, and then propose solutions. We urgently need to build a global partnership of solidarity to supplement the efforts made by our countries. Only in this way will we be able to deal with the problems of poverty, hunger and the lack of access to education and health care. Clearly, every country is responsible for achieving its own economic and social development by applying the proper policies to mobilize domestic resources. But those national efforts should be supplemented by explicit commitments by the developed countries to promote and facilitate access to international markets and more balance in economic relations and in the price of products.

The experience of developed countries themselves shows that, without external cooperation, they would have had difficulty in prospering or in restructuring their economies.

The reciprocal increase in production and trade is a driving force for development. However, the trend towards more concentrated productive expansion and insufficient participation in the benefits of world trade condemn the majority of countries to marginalization from development. For this reason, Paraguay calls once again for the right of all nations to more even-handed, equitable treatment, including the right to build a new form of solidarity among States which are capable of promoting progress on a global scale.

Agricultural subsidies, protectionism, the lack of technology transfers and the distortions in international trade, together with ethnocentric control of information, knowledge and science, postpone development and punish countries on the periphery with a pre-modern and wasted life. Because of those recurrent circumstances, we are convinced that the tariffs and non-tariff barriers that are applied not only by developed countries but also by our own regional partners must be removed. Only in that way can we quickly overcome asymmetries and unjust discrimination.

Society expects more of democracy and of politicians. It expects the system that guarantees liberty and equality before the law also to be a system which promotes and ensures the well-being of all and puts an end to exclusion. Unfortunately, this basic conception of politics is not reflected in the behaviour of many actors. In practice, petty interests, selfishness and party faction are considered more important and have greater priority than the interests of the nation. Democracy as government in the service of the common good is being bastardized. That gives rise to the lack of prestige and devaluation of politics and democracy, particularly in Latin America.

This erratic direction that politics is taking must be corrected in countries which do not have a democratic tradition: we have only just built low-quality democracy, a pseudo-democracy laced with conspiracies against good governance and the exercise of power based on legitimacy and the will of the majority of the people.

In any event, in Paraguay, we are making a great effort. School attendance is showing exponential growth. Educational reform, now extended to higher education, has practically universalized basic education. The secondary school population is following the same trend, while university enrolment has doubled through the institutionalization of equal opportunities and conditions. According to the United Nations itself, Paraguay is in a position to achieve, for example, the Millennium Development Goal related to education. One of our key objectives here is to gain certification of zero illiteracy for our country by 2008.

Together with improving and significantly expanding public and private health-care services, our environmental policy is recovering the great ecological sustainability which characterized Paraguay. This is taking place in the midst of silent agrarian reform. In addition to the massive purchase of land for orphan peasants — which is still insufficient to alleviate the unfair distribution of land in Paraguay — we are implementing a policy aimed at rural settlement and increased production and productivity as a way of giving fresh significance to peasant life, its sustainability and its dignity.

Positive action is also taking place with a view to modernizing the State through simplification, transparency and making its services effective. We are seeking to improve public safety, combat corruption and eradicate piracy, drug trafficking and smuggling. If one looks at the crime index, Paraguay has one of the lowest rates. Nevertheless, we are obliged to improve legal security, and to do that we must implement a

policy of professional qualification and establish ethics in the judicial system.

Development financing continues to be limited in terms of fulfilling national development plans and programmes, both those which are the result of international mobilization and those which result from the domestic mobilization of financial resources. This situation reflects the viability of various projects which are directed towards expanding productive employment, improving basic social services, education and adapting productive infrastructure and other areas of action which are essential for development.

We are aware that the main task begins within our countries. It is we who bear the main responsibility. However, with the increase in domestic savings, good macroeconomic policies and a predictable country, we in Paraguay are reducing poverty and are moving towards development. Therefore, our country continues to focus on rationalizing public expenditure and on social and productive investment. This fiscal discipline makes us worthy of increased support from international financial institutions. But what we need in Latin America, as the President of our sister Republic of Bolivia said earlier today, are markets and partners, not bosses or others who would continue to seize the wealth and natural resources of the peoples of our region.

On the subject of human rights, we welcome the fact that, through a process of focused consultations, the General Assembly, in March, adopted resolution 60/251, which established the Human Rights Council. That Council will have a mechanism for the periodic and universal review of States' compliance with their obligations in this important area, a review based on dialogue and cooperation. What we want is that the criteria for assessing human rights be applied in the same way and using the same principles both to developing countries and to developed countries. The assessment of human rights would thus not affect only developing countries and countries with emerging economies, which are making great efforts at institution-building and at consolidating democracy and freedom.

The fight against terrorism should unite people who love liberty and seek respect for human rights and the rule of law. While it is true that fundamentalism of all kinds is anachronistic and dangerous, terrorism should not be the only item on the international agenda, excluding or relegating to the back burner the equally crucial debate on poverty and development in countries with peripheral capitalism and those with emerging economies. Civilization means respect for diversity and differences. Combating terrorism thus requires that any repressive action be carried out within the jurisdiction of international law and not through mere administrative procedures.

With regard to the question of the representation in the United Nations of the 23 million inhabitants of Taiwan, Paraguay, consistent with the position it has long held, confirms its support in favour of their admission to the United Nations. Their inclusion is consistent with the principle of universality embodied in our Charter, as well as with the norms of international law.

To address the problems and conflicts now facing the international community, it is necessary to create a multipolar world and to make it function. The equilibrium of our twenty-first-century universe replete with uncertainty, depends on multipolarity. For that reason, my country and the Common Market of the South (MERCOSUR) place their hopes on that approach, and in particular on the reform of the Security Council. It is shameful that what occurs in the Council should be seen as more important than the United Nations as an Organization which promotes a culture of peace, global development and the universalization of science and technology.

In Latin America, as was said by my friend the President of our sister Republic of Bolivia, we have a culture of peace and brotherhood. We seek harmony with our fellow human beings and with nature. Unfortunately, at other times in our history, we have experienced warfare — not because our peoples wanted it, but because of manipulation by imperialists thirsting to destroy our wealth and fragment our peoples. We have put that history behind us. Today we look to the future to see how we in our region can pool our efforts to deal with poverty and recover our peoples' political, economic and cultural sovereignty.

In addition, the hierarchy and institutional structure of the United Nations depend on a world where equilibrium prevails, ensuring fairness in decisions and action. We do not need sermons about education for peace and the megamillions spent on the arms build-up. We are not naïve and were offended to

see that in 2004 alone, the super-Powers spent sums of money on rearming that could have put an end to poverty and ignorance in the world.

Certainly military belligerence, which is so destructive and so threatening, is not unrelated to the scandalous rise in the price of oil today, which is causing insecurity, economic slowdown and stagnation in the developing countries. Inequality for our peoples should not mean that we must take bread out of the mouths of the poor in order to waste millions of dollars on fratricidal weapons.

Over and above the events that threaten world peace are the daily lives of people. In our region, life is good only for the minority and miserable for the majority.

Therefore, we urgently need a United Nations that makes a contribution to the development, well-being and freedom of all peoples. Likewise, it is our duty to build an entirely prosperous, fair and united society so that the countenances of our citizens reflect their happy lives. May God illuminate our path, so that there can be brotherhood among all nations and individuals, and so that our history can truly embark on the path of peace.

The President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the President of the Republic of Paraguay for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Nicanor Duarte Frutos, President of the Republic of Paraguay, was escorted from the General Assembly Hall.

Address by Mr. Omer Hassan Al-Bashir, President of the Republic of the Sudan

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): The Assembly will now hear an address by the President of the Republic of the Sudan.

Mr. Omer Hassan Al-Bashir, President of the Republic of the Sudan, was escorted into the General Assembly Hall.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations His Excellency Mr. Omer Hassan Al-Bashir, President of the Republic of the Sudan, and to invite him to address the Assembly.

President Al-Bashir (*spoke in Arabic*): It gives me great pleasure, Madam, to extend my warmest congratulations to you on your election as President of the General Assembly at its sixty-first session. There is no doubt that your election is an honour for us, because of the excellent relations between our two sisterly countries. I am fully confident that you will lead our deliberations to a successful conclusion. I would like also to commend your predecessor, Mr. Jan Eliasson, for the efficient way in which he guided the work of the previous session. I seize this opportunity, furthermore, to express our appreciation for the endeavours of the United Nations Secretariat in the past period.

The Members of the United Nations are about to select a new Secretary-General. We hope that they will choose a new Secretary-General who will undertake his duties in a neutral, objective and transparent manner, so that our Organization can achieve the purposes to which we all aspire, serving the international community in achieving peace, stability and global prosperity.

I take this opportunity to welcome the Republic of Montenegro to membership of this Organization.

This session has special importance for my country. It occurs on the fiftieth anniversary of the Sudan joining the United Nations after it gained its independence in the mid-twentieth century. The five decades that have passed since then have strengthened the aspirations of our country and our people for an effective and fair United Nations, as well as our conviction that the independence and political freedom achieved by our country, as well as our hopes for a bright, prosperous and developed future, could be destroyed by the challenges of the present phase, including the double standards, the dangers of hegemony and the use of international forums to achieve political, economic or strategic objectives.

The Government and the people of the Sudan eagerly seek peace, which has become our strategic objective. Because of our sincere will and strong desire, peace has become a living reality. In January 2005 we witnessed the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement. That Agreement did merely address the causes of the dispute between the south and the north, but offered fair solutions to all the problems faced by our country. It established political rules for a system that recognizes citizenship as a basis for rights and duties, and that recognizes diversity and considers it to be a source of strength and unity. The system is

based on power-sharing, democratic principles, the rule of law, good governance and respect for human rights and freedoms.

In the economic area, that Agreement establishes rules for wealth-sharing in accordance with criteria of fairness, brotherhood and equality between the central Government and the provinces of the south and the north. The Agreement is based on sound principles and standards of justice and thus establishes the correct rules for a comprehensive peace, which should prevail throughout the country.

The implementation of the Agreement has progressed at the national level. A Government of National Unity has been formed, as was a Government of South Sudan. Legislative bodies have also been established, as well as the National Constitutional Review Commission, the National Judicial Services Commission and the National Petroleum Commission. All options were presented to the President, who selected the best among them. At the moment, serious efforts continue to complete work on the other commissions realistically, objectively and with good intentions. We have also begun, in cooperation with the United Nations, to prepare for the return of refugees and displaced persons, some of whom have already returned.

We were convinced that peace would not fully succeed unless it also prevailed among our people in Darfur. I am pleased to convey to the Assembly that in May we were able to sign the Darfur Peace Agreement, in Abuja. That had been a principal objective since the conflict in that region began. We express our deep gratitude and appreciation to all those who contributed to bringing about that great achievement, prominent among them the African Union, which has contributed troops since the beginning of the crisis and has sponsored the negotiations on the issue. We also thank sisterly Nigeria, which has hosted the negotiations, and the other partners who have worked to bring the divergent views closer together and have spared no effort in pushing the parties towards an agreement. The great role undertaken by the African Union in Darfur is proof of what regional organizations can do to settle disputes in their regions.

That pioneering experiment should impel the Security Council to encourage all such organizations and genuinely and objectively support them in the maintenance of regional peace and security, in accordance with the United Nations Charter and without their efforts being aborted or their roles pre-empted by certain hegemonic parties that have their own illegal agendas.

We have begun steps to implement the Agreement, through ongoing consultations with the African Union and the Sudanese parties that are signatories to the Agreement, in particular concerning security arrangements, the sharing of power and wealth and the return of displaced persons, in addition to preparing for the Darfur-Darfur dialogue.

We have buttressed the implementation effort — which is being carried out according to a timetable — by appointing Mr. Minni Arko Minawi, leader of the Sudan Liberation Movement, as senior assistant to the President and Chairman of the Transitional Darfur Regional Authority. the Authority will be responsible for enforcing the provisions of the Agreement. Those steps will take us to the final phase: completion of all the mechanisms necessary to implement the Agreement.

Here we reaffirm the Government of National Unity's commitment to the Agreement in letter and in spirit. I take the opportunity to sincerely invite all the parties that have not yet signed the Agreement or joined the peace process to do so, in order to consolidate national efforts towards attaining stability.

If the armed factions continue to refuse to join the peace efforts, and persist in violence against and intimidation of citizens, they must be isolated and prevented from acting, in accordance with the Abuja Peace Agreement, which also stipulates that efforts by all signatories to the Agreement should be encouraged, in order to accelerate full implementation in letter and in spirit. The international community would thus be enabled to assist us in strengthening our capacity to bring about rehabilitation and reconstruction.

We hope and expect that the international community will fulfil its commitments concerning the cancellation of all of our foreign debt to States or to financial institutions, and will lift all restrictions and economic and trade sanctions that had been imposed by some international parties. These are impeding our reconstruction and development efforts. We will thus be able to shoulder the burden of reconstruction, increase the rate of growth and provide a life of dignity for our people.

It is regrettable that some influential international parties, rather than fulfilling their pledges and commitments and respecting the provisions of the Abuja Peace Agreement, continue instead to undermine those efforts through unfair and unjustifiable pressures and partiality, and through the negative signals that they send to non-signatories of the Abuja Agreement. This has culminated in the exploitation of the Security council, which has adopted resolutions that serve those parties' interests and strategies, such as Council resolution 1706 (2006) which seeks to undermine national and regional endeavours to implement the Abuja Agreement, as that resolution contradicts the Agreement in letter and in spirit. Indeed, it would place our country under the trusteeship of those influential parties. That makes it imperative to continue our efforts to implement the Abuja Agreement and to mobilize the resources and funding necessary to achieve a sustainable peace in Darfur, so that our country and our region can enjoy the fruits of that peace.

Mr. Jenie (Indonesia), Vice-President, took the Chair.

Our country refuses all forms of dictates and all attempts to humiliate it and usurp its national will. It wholly rejects any attempts to re-colonize us in a new, sly manner. Thus we reject all attempts to impose new international forces in Darfur without taking into account Darfur's special circumstances and without consultations with the Government of Sudan. The subject has become, in itself, a goal in the service of some internal political objectives of some parties.

World leaders who met here last September to follow up the results of the Millennium Summit adopted a document that calls for reform of the United Nations, the promotion of international peace and security, respect for human rights, adoption of collective measures to combat poverty and bringing about development and, in particular as regards issues pertaining to funding development based on the Monterrey Consensus.

What has been agreed to with regard to promoting the role of the United Nations calls upon us to work collectively with the necessary political will, particularly on the part of the permanent members of the Security Council. That should enable the Organization to carry out its work in a truly democratic manner.

In this context, we call for agreement on reform of the Security Council and updating its working methods. The Council's present composition does not achieve this; it is an impediment to what we are seeking — real democracy in the management of international relations. What makes the call for reform more imperative is the eruption of conflicts that threaten peace and security without the Council making any effective move to contain them. A good case in point are the tragic developments in the Middle East. The Council watched helplessly while those developments occurred. This emphasizes the point that structural and institutional reform of the Security Council has become more imperative today than ever before.

In this context, my delegation reaffirms its commitment to the African position as stipulated in the Ezulwini document, a position that was reiterated at the African summits held in Sirte, Khartoum and Banjul.

The follow-up to the outcome of the Millennium Summit has shown clearly that what has been achieved has not met our expectations, particularly in regard to the African continent, which is bleeding to death under its debt burden and is facing an incompatible, non-conducive economic and trade environment. The problems of hunger, poverty and disease in Africa have reached very serious dimensions and constitute a great threat to the international community. They will continue to haunt us unless efforts by the international community are consolidated in order to accelerate fairer development in developing countries, particularly in the least developed ones. It will be impossible to reach the Millennium Development Goal of reducing poverty by half by the year 2015. The correct path towards achieving the MDGs requires that we emphasize the importance of total debt cancellation, as debts are a great impediment to bringing about those goals, particularly in Africa and to the least developed countries.

We attach great importance to the fact that developed countries should fulfil their commitments concerning financing for development and implementing the Brussels Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries. They should work to reform financing institutions, which will promote transparency and lead to larger representation for developing countries in such institutions. They should increase technical and financial assistance so that an investment environment for the private sector can be

created, suitable infrastructures can be brought about, the environment can be protected and corruption can be combated.

The imposition of unilateral coercive economic measures on developing countries constitutes an impediment to freedom of commerce and investment. Funding issues and the transfer of technology are still main components of sustainable development. Here we would like to emphasize the provision of assistance to the least developed countries in social services, education, health care, and for combating diseases such as AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria, which kill millions of people every year.

We seize this opportunity to reaffirm once again our commitment to what we agreed on in the Millennium Declaration and to reaching the Goals contained therein for a better life for humanity as a whole, with full emphasis on the right of developing countries to determine their own development priorities without restrictions or prior conditions that would hinder their development efforts. We would like to highlight also the importance of guaranteeing that the proposed new financing mechanisms will not negatively impact investment flows.

The Sudan has made great efforts towards achieving those Goals and has achieved noticeable progress, particularly in reducing the poverty rate and expanding public education, despite the unjust embargo and the long-standing conflict in the south of the country.

My country has expressed its condemnation of terrorism in all its forms and manifestations and has called for the adoption of an international strategy to combat it. In this context, we believe that the definition of terrorism distinguishes it clearly from the just struggle by people to preserve their legitimate right to defend their freedom and the right to self-determination. That must be the main pillar on which the international community should fully agree. The Sudan believes in the international campaign to combat the phenomenon of terrorism, in accordance with the United Nations Charter, principles of international law and the inviolability of the sovereignty of States.

The question of Palestine is a story that embodies the suffering of a people that has been deprived of its political and economic rights. The Israeli occupation continues to be a heavy burden on the legitimate Palestinian dreams to bring about freedom and development. The international community must force Israel to fulfil the obligations it has undertaken, including the road map, halting construction of the separation wall, and heeding the Advisory Opinion of the International Court of Justice issued in July 2004. This was adopted by the General Assembly at its tenth emergency session, enabling the Palestinian people to exercise its right to self-determination and to establish an independent State, with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital.

We renew our full support to the Palestinian people and its elected institutions. We call on the international community to respect the choices made by the Palestinian people and to shoulder its responsibilities vis-à-vis the Palestinian Government — which has come about through free and fair elections — to lift the embargo imposed against it and to support it. We call upon the international community to pressure Israel to halt its ongoing aggression against the Gaza Strip and release the abducted Palestinian ministers and parliamentarians.

The Israeli aggression against Lebanon last August, which targeted innocent civilians — women and children — has shaken the world's conscience. This is a flagrant violation of international humanitarian law and agreements. We would like to express our full solidarity with the people and the Government of Lebanon and with the resistance. We commend their steadfastness in the face of this flagrant aggression, and we hold Israel responsible for the destruction and the sabotage of brotherly Lebanon. We call for the establishment of an international commission to investigate the war crimes perpetrated by Israel, and we call also on international, regional and volunteer organizations to intensify their emergency efforts to provide assistance to the victims.

We have always been convinced that the volatility of the situation in the Middle East and the ongoing tensions are due to the Israeli occupation, and that a comprehensive settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict and the advent of peace in the region cannot be achieved unless Israel withdraws completely from all the territories occupied since 1967, including the occupied Syrian Golan and the Shab'a farms.

We wish to emphasize in that context the importance of making the Middle East a zone free of weapons of mass destruction, with no exceptions, in

order to bring about security and stability, which would benefit all the peoples of the region.

We reiterate our support for Iraq and its territorial integrity. We believe that its sovereignty should extend to all its territory, and we call on all segments of Iraqi society to engage in dialogue with a view to resolving their problems. We welcome the initiative of the League of Arab States to hold a national reconciliation conference, and we support all sincere efforts aimed at bringing stability to brotherly Iraq, so that it can resume its rightful place in the regional context.

In Somalia, there have been recent positive developments in the reconciliation process led by the Sudan, in coordination with the Arab League, which have led to the Somali Transitional Federal Government signing an agreement with the Islamic Courts Union and a reconciliation statement in Khartoum in June 2006. There is no doubt that this will promote the reconciliation efforts currently led at the regional level by the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD). We hope that our brothers in Somalia will continue the dialogue and promote reconciliation efforts in order to bring about stability and security, so that sisterly Somalia can transcend this very difficult phase.

We are fully convinced that Africa is rich in human resources and cultural heritage and that it has the material and human means to ensure a bright future for itself. However, Africa faces many complex challenges, such as the achievement of stability and development.

Unless all of Africa works in a united and concerted manner, it will not be possible to realize our aspirations. We in Africa, more than anyone else, are responsible for translating those aspirations into reality. We are prepared to work, in an effective partnership with others, to do so. That will benefit our African peoples and contribute to stability at the international level, as envisaged by the New Partnership for Africa's Development initiative.

The Great Lakes region is emerging from a lengthy and deadly conflict, which has given way to a phase in which democracy is taking root. The International Conference for the Great Lakes Region, which is still in the preparatory stages and is aimed at defining conditions and criteria conducive to ongoing regional cooperation among the States of the region, will hold its second summit next December in Nairobi to adopt a treaty on security and stability in the region. The process is facilitated by the United Nations, the African Union and some of our partners and is tangible proof of the genuine political will of the countries of the region. It is a unique initiative to build peace in the region.

I should like from this rostrum to call on the international community to step up the pace in the provision of the financial and political support necessary to push this treaty forward and ensure its adoption for the Great Lakes region. We call for support for the implementation of that treaty, so that the peoples of the region will cease being victimized by disputes, humanitarian disasters or insecurity and be able to realize their aspirations to peace, stability and development.

Agenda item 8 (*continued*)

General debate

Address by Mr. Jens Stoltenberg, Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Norway

Mr. Jens Stoltenberg, Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Norway, was escorted to the rostrum.

The Acting President: I have great pleasure in welcoming His Excellency Mr. Jens Stoltenberg, Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Norway, and inviting him to address the General Assembly.

Mr. Stoltenberg (Norway): The United Nations is now more at the centre of international affairs than it has been for many years. We see the Secretary-General and his staff driving diplomacy. They are on the ground, moving forward peace efforts in the Middle East and coordinating and sustaining peace operations in Lebanon. The United Nations is drawing up mandates and getting ready for new and urgent assignments, such as the one in Darfur.

The United Nations is assisting countries coming out of conflict, such as Burundi and Sierra Leone. It is giving protection under international law to soldiers and civilians in Afghanistan. It is also launching a Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy.

It is to the United Nations that we all turn when other processes fail, and Norway is working hard to support its leading role, be it by sending naval units to

to change, adapt to new situations and relinquish tasks that are no longer needed. We need to ensure that less is spent on bureaucracy, and more is spent in the field.

Let us take, for example, the coordination of humanitarian relief after the establishment of the Central Emergency Response Fund headed by Jan Egeland. With these resources, he is able to coordinate more effectively through the direction of the financial flows. In the absence of a crisis governance and financing cannot be separated.

All matters of reform seem extremely controversial here in the United Nations, but they must be carried out. The most irresponsible thing we could do now would be to do nothing, i.e. to allow bodies, governing boards and their representatives to duplicate work and squander scarce resources.

The report of the High-level Panel on System-wide Coherence will be presented to the Secretary-General later this year. We have had an open, transparent process. We have held meetings in all parts of the world and listened to a great many stakeholders, practitioners and country representatives. My plea to you all — to all the Member States — is to meet that report with an open mind.

Let me be clear about this: any efficiency gain must be channelled back to the developing world. Every single cent gained in improved performance or reduced overhead must go to aid that reaches the needy. Recipients and donors alike would find that attractive.

We are in the fortunate position of having set clear goals for the Organization. Six years ago we adopted the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) here in New York. We pledged to do our utmost to achieve these goals — Norway is working on all eight. This year we give 0.96 per cent of our gross national product in development assistance and we will reach the 1 per cent mark in a few years.

Now we have vigorously set out to take a lead in realizing Millennium Development Goal 4, which compels us to reduce child mortality by two thirds by 2015. Every year, children, in numbers equal to one and a half times the population of New York City, die before their fifth birthday — most of them from preventable diseases. A number of children, equal to the death toll in the recent tsunami, die every month from pneumonia alone. Vaccines, costing just $20 for

each child, could have prevented most of those common diseases.

Allowing such child mortality puts shackles on the growth potential of States, prolonging the long night of underdevelopment. This can and must be changed. Yesterday I announced that the Norwegian Government has decided to increase its annual contribution to child mortality and vaccines from $75 million per year to $125 million next year. In total, Norway will contribute $1.3 billion through 2015 for vaccine-related activities to reduce child mortality.

The next step will be to develop a global strategy for reaching Millennium Development Goal 4, specifically a plan for financing and execution. Meeting that Goal, and other Millennium Development Goals, really depends on United Nations reform. An organization that sets goals and carves them in stone — as we did when we adopted the Millennium Development Goals — such an organization must adapt its structure and methods of work to these goals.

We also have to reform the United Nations to reduce child mortality, i.e. in order to save lives as we said we should. We have done great things in the past and have greater means than any other generation and any other organization. I invite you all to join this global campaign for child survival.

The Acting President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Norway for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Jens Stoltenberg, Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Norway, was escorted from the rostrum.

Address by Ms. Teima Onorio, Vice-President of the Republic of Kiribati

The Acting President: The Assembly will now hear an address by the Vice-President of the Republic of Kiribati.

Ms. Teima Onorio, Vice-President of the Republic of Kiribati, was escorted to the rostrum.

The Acting President: I have great pleasure and honour in welcoming Her Excellency Ms. Teima Onorio, Vice-President of the Republic of Kiribati, and in inviting her to address the General Assembly.

Ms. Onorio (Kiribati): I bring to you all warm greetings from the President, Government and people of the Republic of Kiribati, on whose behalf I am honoured and privileged to address this Assembly this evening.

Allow me, Sir, to offer my heartiest congratulations to Ms. Al-Khalifa on her election to the presidency of the General Assembly at its sixty-first session. I am confident that under her able stewardship this session will successfully deliver constructive and productive outcomes that will benefit the membership. I wish also to offer my congratulations to her predecessor for his successful guidance of the work of the Assembly during the past year.

May I also express to the Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, my warmest congratulations on his sterling leadership of the Organization during his tenure in office. We are grateful for the excellent work he has done in navigating the Organization through the challenges of the past decade. We wish him well in his future endeavours.

We continue to be confronted with major challenges. Those challenges affect each of us as individual countries and as members of the international community. Peace and security remain elusive in this world of ours, given the ongoing conflicts and the threat of new conflicts around the world. Terrorism continues to plague us, despite the best concerted and collective efforts. Still more needs to be done to remove the threat posed by the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. And while some progress has been made towards addressing the threat posed by the continuing illicit trade in small arms and light weapons, further work is needed to eliminate that threat.

For the least developed countries and the small island developing States, the challenges of economic development remain at the forefront of our agendas. Marginalization in the global economy is a feature common to many least developed countries and small island developing States. The record high price of oil has done little to ease the burden on our small economies.

In Kiribati, our remoteness and insularity, narrow economic base, small population size and high population growth rates are factors with which we must contend. We must also deal with the HIV/AIDS pandemic and tuberculosis, among other diseases.

which require the diversion of the already meagre resources at our disposal to finance development.

With those daunting challenges looming, we are forced to operate in an environment of uncertainty. I say "uncertainty", because our very survival as a nation and as a people with a distinct culture and way of life is being threatened by global warming and sea-level rise.

These are challenges that we, as individual countries and as Members of this collective body, need to continue to work together to address. In this increasingly interdependent world of ours, ripples emanating from one part will ultimately reach out to touch the shores of others.

Kiribati consists of low-lying coral atolls and is particularly vulnerable to the impact of global warming and sea-level rise. For countries such as ours, global warming and sea-level rise are critical security issues. While we welcome the support that has been forthcoming in developing adaptation strategies to these phenomena, there is a limit to the extent to which we can adapt. Rising sea levels will affect our groundwater supply and gradually erode whatever land is available on our 33 islands. Yes, we could always move inland to avoid the rising sea levels. But, given the narrowness of our islands, if we move inland too far, we risk falling into either the lagoon or the ocean.

We will continue to call on the international community to agree on a unified global response to these phenomena. We will continue to work with like-minded countries in pushing the case for such a response. We have been disappointed at the lack of consensus on these critical environmental issues. Indeed, we deplore the notion that economic growth should take precedence over environmental issues when the quest for such growth threatens the very survival of some Members of the Organization.

Kiribati is a strong supporter of environmental conservation efforts. In that regard, we have announced the establishment of the Phoenix Islands Protected Area, which is recognized as the third largest marine protected area in the world. We are pleased to have been able to contribute to global environmental conservation efforts through the Protected Area. We are prepared to work with those willing and able to ensure its sustainability.

We note the progress that has been made with regard to reforming the United Nations. Understandably, we would have liked to see greater progress made by now, but we fully recognize the need for more discussions on the various relevant issues.

Indeed, that is multilateralism in practice. The debate on unilateralism versus multilateralism in world affairs continues unabated. We see multilateralism in full play in the debate on United Nations reform. We consider that to be a reflection of the healthy interest that each Member country has in the Organization. Indeed, in this day and age, multilateralism would seem to be a more appropriate approach than unilateralism.

Consensus has yet to be reached on reform of the Security Council. We note with interest the report of the Working Group. While acknowledging the very strong interest in the issues raised and the need to forge a consensus, we believe that perhaps there is also a need to consider how much more time will be required to move this forward.

Our position on the issue remains unchanged: those Member States that are major contributors to United Nations programmes — especially with regard to the maintenance of global peace and security — should be accorded permanent membership of the Security Council. In our view, Japan, as such a Member State, qualifies for permanent membership.

Regional cooperation in the Pacific has been effective. In the recent past, we have had a number of examples of success in regional cooperative efforts. The Regional Assistance Mission to the Solomon Islands has made substantial contributions to securing peace and law and order in that country. Kiribati is pleased to have been able to contribute civilian police personnel to the Mission. We will continue to support its work as long as the people and the Government of the Solomon Islands wish it to continue.

The Pacific Regional Assistance to Nauru programme has made positive contributions to Nauru. In view of the historical ties between our two countries, we have worked closely with Nauru on a bilateral basis and remain committed to considering other options through which we can extend our collaboration.

Our leaders will be meeting next month to discuss, among other things, progress on the Pacific Plan. We are satisfied with the initial progress. The success or lack thereof of the Pacific Plan will depend on a number of factors, including the political commitment of each member country to the Plan and the Plan's ability to deliver tangible benefits over and above what is available, on a bilateral basis, to its membership.

We extend a warm welcome to the Republic of Montenegro, which joined the Organization as a Member this year. Montenegro's membership brings to 192 the total United Nations membership. The continuing desire on the part of many to join the Organization attests to the value and continued relevance of the United Nations.

Therefore, I note with much disappointment and regret that the desire of the 23 million people of Taiwan to join this Organization of ours continues to be rejected, despite Taiwan's demonstrated ability, willingness and commitment to contribute to international collaborative efforts in the pursuit of global peace and security. In recent years there has been much talk of good governance, of democratizing nations. Should we not also talk about adopting a policy of good governance in our multilateral organizations? Should we also not talk about democratizing our multilateral organizations? We deplore the sad state of affairs in which a nation of 23 million people is deliberately exempt from participation as an equal member of the international community.

The President of the General Assembly has our full support as she carries out the duties of her office. We commit ourselves to working closely with her as we collectively seek to address the challenges facing us.

Allow me to close by conveying to all members of the General Assembly our traditional greeting to assure us to achieve — health, peace and prosperity.

The Acting President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the Vice-President of the Republic of Kiribati for the statement she has just made.

Mr. Tyeta Onetto, Vice-President of the Republic of Kiribati, was escorted from the rostrum.

The meeting rose at 9.20 p.m.